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The Lad with Wings

By Berta Ruck (Mrs. Oliver Onions).

Author of "His Official Fiancée," "The Courtship of Rosamond Fayre," etc.

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DEDICATED, WITH AFFECTION,
TO THAT BRAINLESS ARMY TYPE
MY YOUNGEST BROTHER.

"The men of my own stock,
Bitter-bad they may be,
But at least they hear the things I hear
They see the things I see."

KIPLING.

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PART I

MAY, JUNE, JULY, 1914

THE LAD WITH WINGS

CHAPTER I

AERIAL LIGHT HORSE

HENDON!

An exquisite May afternoon, still and sunny. Above, a canopy of unflecked sapphire-blue. Below, the broad khaki-green expanse of the flying-ground, whence the tall, red-white-and-blue pylons pointed giant fingers to the sky.

Against the iron railings of the ground the border of chairs was thronged with spectators; women and girls in summery frocks, men in light overcoats with field-glasses slung by a strap about them. The movement of this crowd was that of a breeze in a drift of coloured petals; the talk and laughter rose and fell as people looked about at the great sheds with their huge lettered names, at the big stand, at the parked-up motors behind the seats; at the men in uniform carrying their brass instruments slowly across to the bandstand on the left.

At intervals everybody said to everybody else: "Isn't this just a perfect afternoon for the flying?"

* * * * * *

Presently, there passed the turnstile entrance at the back of the parked motor-cars a group of three young girls, chattering together.

One was in pink; one was in cornflower-blue. The girl who walked between them wore all white, with a sunshine-yellow jersey-coat flung over her arm. Crammed well down upon her head she wore a shady white hat, bristling with a flight of white wings; it seemed to overshadow the whole of her small compact, but supple little person, which was finished off by a pair of tiny, white-canvas-shod feet. She was the youngest as well as the smallest of the trio standing at the turnstile. (Observe her, if you please; then leave or follow her, for she is the Girl of this story.)

"This is my show!" she declared. Her softly-modulated voice had a trace of Welsh accent as she added, "I'm paying for this, indeed!"

"No, you aren't, then, Gwenna Williams!" protested the girl in pink (whose accent was Higher Cockney). "We were all to pay for ourselves!"

"Yes; but wasn't it me that made you come into the half-crown places because I was so keen to see a flying-machine *close?* . . . I'll pay the difference then, if you *must* make a fuss. We'll settle up at the office on Monday," said the girl who had been addressed as Gwenna Williams.

With a girlish, self-conscious little gesture she took half a sovereign out of her wash-leather glove and handed it to the tall, bemedalled commissionaire.

"Come on, now, girls," she said. "This is going to be lovely!" And she led the way forward to that line of seats, where there were just three green chairs vacant together.

Laughing, chattering, gay with the ease of Youth in its own company, the three, squeezed rather close to-

gether by the press, sat down; Gwenna, the Welsh girl, in the middle. The broad brim of her hat brushed against the roses of the pink-clad girl's cheaper hat as Gwenna leaned forward.

"Sorry, Butcher," she said. She moved.

This time one of the white wings caught a pin in the hat of the plump blonde in blue, who exclaimed resignedly and in an accent that was neither of Wales nor of England, "Now komm I also into this hat-business of Candlestick-maker. It *is* a bit of oll right!"

"*So* sorry, Baker," apologized the girl in white again, putting up her hands to disengage the hat. "I'll take it off, like a matinée. Yes, I will, indeed. We shall all see better." She removed the hat from a small head that was very prettily overgrown with brown, thick, cropped curls. The bright eyes with which she blinked at first in the strong sunlight were of the colour of the flying-ground before them: earth-brown and turf-green mixed.

"I will hold your hat, since it is for me that you take him off," said the girl whom they called Baker.

Her real name was Becker; Ottilie Becker. She worked at the German correspondence of that London office where the other two girls, Gwenna Williams and Mabel Butcher, were typists. It was one of the many small jokes of the place to allude to themselves as the Butcher, the Baker, and the Candlestick-maker.

All three were excellent friends. . . .

The other two scarcely realized that Gwenna, the Celt, was different from themselves; more absent-minded, yet more alive. A passer-by might have summed her up as "a pretty, commonplace little thing;" a girl like millions of others. But under the ready-made muslin blouse of that season's style there was ripening, all unsuspected, the dormant bud of

Passion. This is no flower of the commonplace. And her eyes were full of dreams, innocent dreams. Some of them had come true already. For hadn't she broken away from home to follow them? Hadn't she left the valley where nothing ever went on except the eternal Welsh rain that blurred the skylines of the mountains opposite, and that drooped in curtains of silver-grey gauze over the slate roofs of the quarry-village, set in that brook-threaded wedge between wooded hillsides? Hadn't she escaped from that cage of a chapel house sitting-room with its kitchen-range and its many book-shelves and its steel print of John Bunyan and its maddening old grandfather-clock that *always* said half-past two and its everlasting smell of singeing hearthrug, and *never* a window open? Yes! she'd given her uncle-guardian no peace until he'd washed his hands over Gwenna's coming up to London. So here she was in London now, making fresh discoveries every day, and enjoying that mixture of drudgery and frivolling that makes up the life of the London bachelor-girl. She was still "fancy-free," as people say of a girl who loves and lives in fancies, and she was still at the age for bosom-friendships. One sincerely adored girl-chum had her confidence. This was a young woman at the Residential Club, where Gwenna lived; not one of these from the office.

But the office trio could take an occasional Saturday jaunt together as enjoyingly as if they never met during the week.

* * * * * *

"Postcards, picture postcards!" chanted a shrill treble voice above the buzz of the talking, waiting crowds.

Before the seats a small boy passed with a tray of

photographs. These showed views of the hangars and of the ground; portraits of the aviators.

"Postcards!" He paused before that cluster of blue and white and pink frocks. "Any picture postcards?"

"Yes! Wait a minute. Let's choose some," said Miss Butcher. And three heads bent together over the display of glazed cards. "Tell you what, Baker; we'll send one off to your soldier-brother in Germany. Shall we? All sign it, like we did that one to your mother, from the Zoo."

"Ah, yes. A *bier-karte!*" said the German girl, with her good-natured giggle. "Here, I choose this one. View of Hendon. We write '*Es lassen grüssen unbekannter Weise*'—'there send greeting to Karl, the Unknown.'"

"Oh, but hadn't we better send him this awfully nice-looking airman, just as a sort of example of what a young man really can do in the way of appearance, what?" suggested Miss Butcher, picking out another card. "Peach, isn't he? Look! He's standing up in the thingamagig *just* like an archangel in his car; or do I mean Apollo?—Gwenna'd know. . . . Which are you going to choose, Gwenna?"

Gwenna had picked out three cards. A view of the ground, a picture of a biplane in mid-air, and a portrait of one of the other airmen.

He had been taken in his machine against the blank background of sky. The big, boyish hands gripped the wheel, the cap, goggles in front, peak behind, was pushed back from the careless, clean-shaven lad's face, with its cheeks creased with deep dimples of a smile.

"This one," said Gwenna Williams. And there was no whisper of Fate at her heart as she announced lightly. "This is *my* love." (She did not guess, as

you do, that here was the portrait of the Boy of this story.)

The other girls leaned across her to look as she added: "*He's* the most like Icarus, I think."

"Who's Icarus, when he's at home?" inquired Miss Butcher. And Gwenna, out of one of her skimmed books, gave a hurried explanation of Icarus, the first flying-man, the classic youth who "dared the sun" on wings of wax. . . . Together the girls inspected the postcard of his modern type, the Hendon aviator. They laughed; they read aloud the name "*P. Dampier;*" they compared his looks with those of other airmen, treating the whole subject precisely as they would have treated the dancing or singing of their favourite actresses in the revues. . . .

For it was still May, Nineteen-fourteen in England. The feeling of warm and drowsy peace in the air was only intensified by the brisk, sharp strains of the military band on the left of the flying-ground, playing the "Light Cavalry" march. . . .

"Dear me! Are we going on like this for ever?" remonstrated Gwenna presently. "Aren't they *ever* going up?"

She was answered by a shattering roar from the right.

It ceased. Then, on the field before her excited eyes, there was brought out of one of the hangars by a cluster of mechanics in khaki-brown overalls the Winged Romance that came into this tired and *blasé* world with that most wondrous of all Ages—the Twentieth Century. At first only a long gleaming upper plane, jolting over the uneven ground, could be seen over the heads of the watchers. Then it reached the enclosure. For the first time in her life Gwenna beheld a Maurice Farman biplane.

And for the moment she was a little disappointed, for she had said it was " going to be so lovely ! "

She had expected—what ? Something that would look more like what it was, the new Bird of man's making. Here the sunlight gleamed on the taut, cambered wings, on the bamboo spars, the varnished blade of the motionless propeller, all shiny as a new toyshop. But the girl saw no grace in it. Its skids rested on the sunburned grass like a couple of *ski* in the *Sketch* photographs of winter sports. It had absurd little wheels, too, looking as if, when it had finished ski-ing, the machine might take to roller-skating. The whole thing seemed gaunt and cumbrous and clogged to the earth. Gwenna did not then know that, unlike Antæus, this half-godlike creature only awoke to life and beauty when it felt the earth no more.

Then, as she watched, a mechanic, the Dædalus who strapped on the wings for the Icarus seized the propeller, which kicked thrice, rebelliously, and then, with another roar, dissolved into a circle of mist. Other brown figures were clinging to the under parts of the structure, holding it back ; Gwenna did not see the signal to let go. All that she saw was the clumsy forward run of the thing as, like a swan that tries to clear its feet of the water, the biplane struggled to free itself from the drag of Earth. . . .

Then, as the wonder happened, the untried and imaginative little Welsh country-girl, watching, gave a gasp. " *Ah*—— ! "

The machine was fettered no longer.

Suddenly those absurd skids and wheels had become no more than the tiny feet that a seagull tucks away under itself, and like a gull the biplane rose. It soared, its engine shouting triumph as it sped. Gwenna's heart beat as tensely as that engine. Her eyes sparkled.

What they saw was not now a machine, but the beauty of those curves it cut in the conquered air. It soared, it banked, it swayed gently as if on a keel. Swiftly circling, up and up it went, until it seemed to dwindle to something not even larger than the seagull it resembled; then it was a flying-fish, then a dragonfly wheeling in the blue immensity above.

Suddenly, like a fog-signal, there boomed out the voice of the man with the megaphone, the man who made from the judge's stand behind the committee-enclosure all announcements for the meeting:

"Ladies and gentul MEN," it boomed.
"Mis ter Paul Dampier on a Maurice Farman bi plane!"

The huge convolvulus-trumpet of the megaphone swung round. The announcement was made from the other side of the stand; the sound of that booming voice being subdued as it reached the group of three girls.

"Mister Paul Dampier——"

"You hear, Gwenna? It is *your* young man," said Miss Baker; Miss Butcher adding, "Hope you had a good look at him and saw if that photo did him justice?"

"From here? Well, how could I? It's not much I could see of him," complained Gwenna, laughing. "He only looked about as big as a knot in a cat's cradle!"

Another roar, another small commotion on the ground. Another of those ramshackle looking giant grasshoppers slid forward and upward into the air.

Presently three aeroplanes, then four together were circling and soaring together in the sapphire-blue arena.

Below, a pair of swallows, swift as light, chased each other over the ground, above their own shadows, towards the tea-pavilion.

Yet another flyer winged his tireless way across the aerodrome. He was a droning bee, buzzing and hovering unheeded over a tuft of dusty white clover growing by the rails that were so closely thronged by human beings come to watch and wonder over man's still new miracle of flight.

"Oh, flying! Mustn't it be too glorious!" sighed the Welsh girl, watching the aeroplane that was now scarcely larger than a winged bullet in the blue. "Oh, wouldn't I love to go up! Wouldn't it be Heaven!"

"It's been Heaven for several poor fellows lately," suggested the shrewd, Cockney-voiced little Miss Butcher, grimly, from her right. "What about that poor young What's-his-name, fallen and killed on the spot at twenty-one!"

"I don't call him 'poor,'" declared Gwenna Williams softly. "I should think there could be worse things happen to one than get killed, quickly, right in the middle of being so young and jolly and doing such things——"

"Ah, look! That's it! See that?" murmured a voice near them. "Flying upside down, now, that first one—see him?"

And now Gwenna, at gaze, watched breathlessly the wonder that seemed already natural enough to the multitude; the swoop and curve, the loop and dash and recover of the biplane that seemed for the moment

a winged white quill held in a hand unseen, writing its challenge on the blue wall of Heaven itself.

Again the megaphone boomed out through the still and soft June air:

"Ladies and gentul MEN! Pass enger flights from this aer riodrome may now be booked at the office un der this Stand!"

"Two guineas, my dears, for the chance of breaking your necks," commented Miss Butcher. "Three guineas for a longer flight, I believe; that is, a better chance. Well, I bet that if I did happen to have two gleaming golden jimmyohgoblins to my name, I'd find something else to spend 'em on, first!"

"I also!" agreed Miss Baker.

Gwenna moved a little impatiently. She hadn't two guineas, either, to spend. She still owed a guinea, now, for that unjustifiable extravagance, that white hat with the wings. In spite of earning her own living, in spite of having a little money of her own, left her by her father who had owned shares in a Welsh quarry, she *never* had any guineas! But oh, if she had! *Wouldn't* she go straight off to that stand and book for a passenger-flight! . . .

While her covetous eyes were still on the biplane, her ears caught a stir of discussion that came from the motor nearest to the chairs.

A lady was speaking in a softly dominant voice, the voice of a class that recognizes no overhearing save by its chosen friends.

"My dear woman, it's as safe as the Tubes and the

motor-buses. These exhibition passenger-flights aren't really *flying*, Cuckoo said. Didn't you, Cuckoo?"

A short deep masculine laugh sounded from behind the ladies, then a drawled "What are they then, what? Haw? Flip-flap, White City, what?"

"Men always pretend afterwards that they've never said *anything*. Cuckoo *told* me that when these people 'mean business' they can fly *millions* of times higher and faster than we *ever* see them here. He said there wasn't the *slightest* reason why Muriel shouldn't——"

Here the sound, hard and clear as an icicle, of a very young girl's voice, ringing out:

"And anyhow, mother, I'm *going* to!"

Glancing round, Gwenna saw a lanky girl younger than herself spring down from the big, dove-grey car, and stride, followed by a tall man wearing a top-hat, to the booking-office below the stand. This girl wore a long brown oilskin coat over her white sweater and her short, admirably-cut skirt; a brown chiffon veil tied over her head showed the shape and the auburn gleam of it without giving a hair to the breeze.

"Lovely to be those sort of people," sighed the enviously watching Gwenna, as other girls from the cars strolled into the enclosure with the notice "COMMITTEE ONLY," and seemed to be discussing, laying bets, perhaps, about the impending race for machines carrying a lady-passenger. "Fancy, whenever any of *them* want to do or to see or even to *be* anything, they've only got to say 'Anyhow, I'm going to!' and there they are! *That's* the way to live!"

Presently the three London typists were sitting at a table under the green awning and the hanging flower-baskets; one of a score of tables where folk sat and chatted and turned their eyes ceaselessly upwards to the blue sky, pointed at by those giant pylon-fingers,

invaded by those soaring, whirring, insolent, space daring creatures of man.

The first biplane had been preparing for the Ladies' Race. Now came the start; with the dropped white flag the announcement from that dominating magnified voice:

"Mis ter Damp ier on a
Maurice Far man bi plane
ac companied by Miss Mu
riel Con yers——"

The German girl put in, "Your man again, Gwenna!"

"My man indeed. And I haven't seen him, even yet," complained the Welsh girl again, laughing over her cup of cooling tea, "only in the photograph! Don't suppose I ever shall, either. It's my fate, girls. Noth-ing really exciting ever happens to me!" She sighed, then brightened again as she remembered something. "I must be off now . . . . I've got to go out this evening."

"Anywhere thrilling?" asked Miss Butcher.

"I don't know what it'll be like. It's Leslie Long; it's my friend at the Club's married sister somewhere in Kensington, giving a dinner-party," Gwenna answered in the scrambling New English in which she was learning to disguise her Welshiness, "and there's a girl fallen through at the last minute. So she 'phoned through this morning to ask if this girl could rake anyone up."

"How mouldy for you, my dear," said Mabel Butcher in her sympathetic Cockney as the Welsh girl rose, took up her sunshine-yellow coat from the back of her chair and chinked down a shilling upon her thick

white plate. "Means you'll have to sit next some youth who only forced himself into his dress-suit for the sake of taking that 'fallen through' girl into dinner. He'll be scowling fit to murder you, I expect, for being you and not her. (I know their ways.) Never mind. Pinch a couple of liqueur-choc'lates off the table for me when the Blighted Being isn't looking, will you? And tell us what he's like on Monday, won't you?"

"All right," promised the Welsh girl, smiling back at her friends. She threaded her way through the tables with the plates of coloured cakes, the brown tea-pots, the coarse white crockery. She passed behind that park of cars with that leisured, well-dressed, upward-gazing throng. She turned her back on the glimpse beyond them of the green field where the brown-clad mechanics ran up towards the slowly downward swooping biplane.

As she reached the entrance she caught again the announcement of that distant megaphone:

"Ladies and gentul men Pass enger flights may now be booked——"

The band in the distance was playing the dashing tune of the "Uhlanenritt."

Gwenna Williams passed out of the gates beside the big poster of the aeroplane in full flight carrying a girl-passenger who waved a scarf. It was everywhere, that Spring. So was the other notice:

"An afternoon in the country is always refreshing! Flying is always interesting to watch!"

In the dusty bit of lane mended by the wooden sleepers a line of grass-green taxis was drawn up.

Gwenna hesitated.

Should she——? Taxi all the way home to the Ladies' Residential Club in Hampstead where she lived?

Four shillings, perhaps. . . . Extravagance again! "But it's not an everyday sort of day," Gwenna told herself as she hailed the taxi. "This afternoon, the flying! This evening, a party with Leslie! Oh, and there was I saying to the other girls that nothing exciting ever happened to me!"

For even now every day of her life seemed to this enjoying Welsh *ingénue*, packed with thrills. Thrills of anticipation, of amusement—sometimes of disappointment and embarrassment. But what did those matter? Supreme through all there glowed the conviction of youth that, at any moment, Something-More-Exciting still might happen. . . .

It might be waiting to happen, waiting now, just round the corner. . . .

All young people know that feeling. And to many it remains the most poignant pleasure that they are to know—that thought of "the party to-night," that wonder "what may happen at it!"

CHAPTER II

THE BOSOM-CHUMS

THROUGH leafy side-streets and little squares of Georgian houses, Gwenna's taxi took her to a newer road that sloped sharply from the Heath at the top to the church and schools at the bottom.

The taxi stopped at the glass porch of the large, red-brick building with the many casement-windows, out of which some enterprising committee had formed the Ladies' Residential Club. It was a place where a mixed assembly of young women (governesses, art-students, earnest suffrage workers, secretaries and so on) lived cheaply enough and with a good deal of fun and noise, of feud and good-fellowship. The head of it was a clergyman's widow and the sort of lady who is never to be seen otherwise than wearing a neat delaine blouse of the Edwardian era, a gold curb tie-pin, a hair-net and a disapproving glance.

Gwenna passed this lady in the tessellated hall; she then almost collided with the object of the lady's most constant disapproval.

This was a very tall, dark girl with an impish face, a figure boyishly slim. She looked almost insolently untidy, for she wore a shabby brown hat, something after the pattern of a Boy Scout's, under which her black hair was preparing to slide down over the collar of a rain-coat which (as its owner would have told you) had seen at least two reigns. It was also covered

with loose white hairs, after the fashion of garments whose wearers are continually with dogs.

Gwenna caught joyously at the long arm in the crumpled sleeve.

"Oh, Leslie!" she cried eagerly.

For this was the bosom-chum.

"Ha, Taffy-child! Got back early for this orgie of ours? Good," exclaimed Leslie Long in a clear, nonchalant voice. It was very much the same voice, Gwenna noticed now, as those people's at the flying-ground, who belonged to that easy, lordly world of which Gwenna knew nothing. Leslie, now, did seem to know something about it. Yet she was the hardest-up girl in the whole club. She had been for a short time a Slade student, for a shorter time still a probationer at some hospital. Now all her days were given up to being paid companion to an old lady in Highgate who kept seventeen toy-Poms; but her evenings remained her own.

"Afraid this party isn't going to be much of a spree for you," she told Gwenna as they went upstairs. "I don't know who's going, but my brother-in-law's friends seldom are what you could describe as 'men.' Being a stockbroker and rich, he feels he must go in heavily for Art and Music. Long hair to take you in, probably. Hope you don't awfully mind coming to the rescue——"

"Don't mind what it is, as long as I'm going out somewhere, and with you, Leslie!" the younger girl returned blithely. "Will you do me up the back, presently?"

"Rather! I'm dressing in your room. There's a better light there. Hurry up!"

* * * * * *

Gwenna's long, narrowish front bedroom at the club was soon breathing of that characteristic atmosphere that surrounds the making of a full-dress toilette; warm, scented soap-suds, hot curling-irons, powder, Odol, perfume. The room possessed a large dressing-table, a long wardrobe, and a fairly spacious chest-of-drawers. But all this did not prevent the heaping of Gwenna's bed with the garments, with the gilded, high-heeled cothurns and with the other gauds belonging to her self-invited guest.

That guest, with her hair turbaned in a towel and her lengthy young body sheathed in tricot, towered above the toilet-table like some modern's illustration of a genie in the Arabian Nights. The small, more closely-knit Welsh girl, who wore a kimona of pink cotton crêpe slipping from shoulders noticeably well-modelled for so young a girl, tried to steal a glimpse at herself from under her friend's arm.

"Get out, Taffy," ordered the other coolly. "You're in my way."

"I like *that*," remonstrated Gwenna, laughing. "It's *my* glass, Leslie!"

But she was ready to give up her glass or any of her belongings to this freakish-tongued, kind-hearted, unconventional Leslie Long. Nearly everybody at the club, whether they were of the advanced suffrage party or the orthodox set, were "shocked" at her. Gwenna loved her. Leslie had taken a very homesick little Welsh exile under her wing from her first night at the club; Leslie had mothered her with introductions, loans, advice. Leslie had bestowed upon her that last favour which woman shows to sister-woman when she tells her "*at which shops to buy what.*" Leslie had, practically, dressed her. And it was thanks to this that Gwenna had all the freshness and bloom of the

country-girl without any of the country-girl's all-concealing frumpiness.

Leslie talked an obligato to everything that Leslie did.

"I must dress first. I need it more, because I'm so much plainer than you," said she. "But never mind; it won't take me more than half an hour to transform myself into a credit to my brother-in-law's table. *'I am a chrysoberyl, and 'tis night.'* The Sometimes-Lovely Girl, that's the type I belong to. I was told that, once, by one of the nicest boys who ever loved me. Once I get my hair done, I'll show you. In the meantime you get well out of my way on the bed, Taffy, like a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft. And then I'll explain to you why Romance is dead—oh, shove that anywhere; on the floor—and what the matter is with us modern girls. Fact is, we're losing our Femininity. We're losing the power, dear Miss Williams, to please Men."

She took up a jar of some white paste, and smeared it in a scented mask above her features. As she did so she did not for one moment cease to rattle.

"Men—that is, Nice Men," she gave out unctuously, as she worked the paste with her palms over her Pierrot-like face, "detest all this skin-food—and massage. It's Pampering the Person. No nice girl would think of it. As for this powder-to-finish business, it's only another form of make-up. They always see through it. (Hem!) And they abhor anything that makes a girl—a nice girl—look in the least——" The mocking voice was lowered at the word—"Actressy. . . ! This is what I was told to-day, Taff, dear, by my old lady I take the Poms and Pekes out for. I suppose she's never heard of any actress marrying. But she's a mine of information. Always telling me where I've missed it, and how."

Here the tall girl reached for the silver shoe-horn off Gwenna's dressing-table, and proceeded to use it as the Greek youth used his strigil, stripping the warmed unguent from her face and neck. She went on talking while Gwenna, putting a gloss on her short curls with a brush in each hand, listened and laughed, and watched her from the bed with greeny-brown eyes full of an unreserved admiration. So far, Leslie Long's was the society in which Gwenna Williams most delighted. The younger, less sophisticated girl poured out upon her chum that affection which is not to be bribed or begged. It is not even to be found in any but a heart which is yet untouched, save in its dreams, by Love.

"No Charm about us modern girls. No Mystery," enlarged Miss Long. "No Glamour. (What is glamour? Is it a herb? State reasons for your answer.) What Nice Men love to see in a girl is The Being Apart. (Gem of Information Number Sixty-three.) Sweet, refined, modest; in every look and tone the *gentlewoman*. Not a mere slangy imitation of themselves. (Chuck us that other towel.) Not a creature who makes herself cheap, calls out 'Hi!' and waves to them from the top of omnibuses. Ah, no, my dear; the girl who'll laugh and 'lark' with men on equal terms may *seem* popular with them in a way, but"—here the voice was again lowered impressively—"that's not the girl they marry. She's just 'very good fun,' 'a good sort,' a 'pal.' She's treated just as they'd treat another young man. (I'd watch it!) Which is the girl with whom they fall in love, though? The shrinking, clinging, feminine creature who is all-wool—I mean all-woman, Taffy. *She*"—with enormous expression—"is *never* left long without her mate!"

"But," objected Gwenna doubtfully, "she—this old lady of yours—wasn't married ever?"

"Oh, never. Always lets you know that she has 'loved and lost.' Whether that means 'Killed at the Battle of Waterloo' or merely 'Didn't propose' I couldn't say. . . . Poor old dear, she's rather lonely, in spite of the great cloud of Poms," said the old lady's paid "daily companion," dropping the mockery for the moment, "and I believe she's thankful to have even me to talk to and scold about the horrid, unsexed girl of To-day. . . . Our, lack of . . . everything! Our clothes! Why, she, as a girl, would have sunk into the ground rather than be seen in—you know the kind of thing. Our general shapelessness!—Well, of course," turning to meet that adoring glance from the little heroine-worshipper on the bed, "you never see a young woman nowadays with what you could call a *figure!*"

Here Leslie, reaching for the giant powder-puff she had flung on to the foot of the bed, gave a backward bend and a "straighten" that would not have disgraced an acrobat.

"No waists! Now if there is a feature that a man admires in a girl it's her tiny, trimly-corseted waist. My old lady went to a fancy-dress dance once, in a black-and-yellow plush bodice as 'A *Wasp*,' and everybody said how splendid. She never allowed herself to spread into anything more than Eighteens until she was thirty! But now the girls are allowed to slop about in these loud, fast-looking, golf-jackets or whatever they call them, made just like a man's—and the young men simply aren't marrying any more. No wonder!"

"Oh, Leslie! do you think it's true?" put in Gwenna, a trifle nervously.

"So she told me, my dear. Told Bonnie Leslie, whose bag had been two proposals that same week," said Miss Long nonchalantly. "One of 'em with me in the act of wearing that Futurist Harlequin's get-up at the Art Rebel's Revel. You know; the one I got the idea of from noticing the reflections of the ground-glass diamond patterns on me through the bath-room window. I say! she'd have sunk pretty well through into the Antipodes at the sight of me in that rig, what? Yet here was an infatuated youth swearing that:

'He would like to have the chance
All his life with me to dance,
For he liked his partner best of all!'"

Leslie hummed the old musical-comedy tune. "Son of a *Dean*, too!"

Gwenna looked wistfully thrilled. "Wasn't he—nice enough?"

"Oh, a sweet boy. Handsome eyes. (I always want to pick them out with a fork and put them into my own head.) But too simple for me, thanks," said Leslie lightly. "He was *rather* cut up when I told him so."

"Didn't you tell your old lady—anything about it, Leslie?"

"Does that kind of woman *ever* get told the truth, Gwenna? I trow not. That's why the dear old legends live on and on about what men like and who they propose to. Also the kind old rules, drawn up by people who are past taking a hand in the game."

Again she mimicked the old lady's voice: "Nice men have one standard for the women they marry, and another (a very different standard!) for the—er—women they flirt with. (So satisfactory, don't

you know, for the girl they marry. No *wonder* we never find those marriages being a complete wash-out !) But supposing that a sort of Leslie-girl came along and insisted upon Marriage being brought up to the flirtation standard—*hein ?* "

" But your old lady, Leslie ? D'you mean you just let her go on thinking that you've never had any admiration, and that you've got to agree with everything she says ? "

" Rather ! " said Miss Long with her enjoying laugh. " I take it in with r-r-rapt attention, looking my worst, as I always do when I'm behaving my best. Partly because one's bound to listen respectfully to one's bread-and-butter speaking. And partly because I am genuinely interested in her remarks," said Leslie Long. " It's the interest of a rather smart young soldier—if I may say so—let loose in a museum of obsolete small-arms ! "

Even as she spoke her hands were busy with puff and brush, with hair-pad, pins, and pencil. Gwenna still regarded her with that full, discriminating admiration which is never grudged by one attractive girl to another—of an opposite type.

With the admiration for this was mixed a tiny dread, well known to the untried girl—" If she is what They like, *they won't like me !* " . . . Also a wonder, " What in the world would Uncle have said to *her ?* "

And a mental picture rose before Gwenna of the guardian she had left in the valley. She saw his shock of white, bog-cotton hair, his face of a Jesuit priest and his voice of a Welsh dissenting minister. She heard that much-resented voice declaiming slowly. " Yes, Yes. I know the meaning of London and *self-respect and earning one's own living.* I know all about these College girls and these girls going to

business and working same as the men, 'shoulder to shoulder'—Indeed, it's very likely! '*Something better to do, nowadays, than sit at home frowsting over drawn-thread work until a husband chooses to appear*'—All the same thing! All the same thing! Ass it was in the beginning! '*A wider field*'—for making eyes! And only two eyes to make them with. Oh, forget-ful Providence, not to let a modern girl have four! '*Larger opportunities*'—more chance of finding a young man! Yes, yes. That's it, Gwenna!"

Gwenna, at the mere memory of it, broke out indignantly, "Sometimes I should like to *stab* old people!"

"Meaning the celebrated Uncle Hugh? Too wise, isn't he?" laughed Leslie lightly, with her hands at her hair. "Too full of home-truths about the business girl's typewriter, and the art-student's palette and the shilling thermometer of the hospital nurse, eh? *He* knows that they're the modern girl's equivalent of the silken rope-ladder—what, what? And the chaise to Gretna Green! *This Way Out. This Way —to Romance.* Why not? Allow me, Madam——"

Here she took up an oval box of eighteenth-century enamel, picked out a tiny black velvet patch and placed it to the left of a careless red mouth.

"Effective, I think?"

"Yes; and how can you say there's such a thing as 'obsolete' in the middle of all this?" protested Gwenna. "*Look,* how the old fashions come up again!"

"Child, curb your dialect. '*Look,*'" Leslie mimicked the Welsh girl's rising accent. "'The old fash-shons.' Of course we modify the fashions now to suit ourselves. My old lady had to follow them just as they were. We," said this twentieth-century sage, "are just the same as she was in lots of ways

The all-important thing to us is still what she calls the Mate!"

"M'm,—I don't believe it would be to me," said Gwenna simply. And thinking of the other possibilities of Life—fresh experiences, work, friendship, adventure (flying, say!)—she meant what she said. That was the truth.

Side by side with this, not contradicting but emphasizing it, was another truth.

For, as in a house one may arrange roses in a drawing-room and reck nothing of the homely business of the kitchen—then presently descend and forget, in the smell of baking bread, the flowers behind those other doors, so divided, so uncommunicating, so pigeon-holed are the compartments, lived in one at a time, of a young maid's mind.

Clearer to Gwenna's inner eyes than the larch green and slate purple of her familiar valley had been the colours of a secret picture; herself in a pink summer frock (always a summer frock, regardless of time, season or place) being proposed to by a blonde youth with eyes as blue as lupins. . .

Mocking Leslie was urging her, again in the old lady's tone, to "wait until Mr. Right came along. Jewelled phrase! Such an old world fragrance about it; moth powder, I suppose. Yet we know what it means, and they didn't. We know it isn't just anybody in trousers that would *be* Mr. Right. (My dear! I use such strange expressions; I quite shock me sometimes)," she interpolated; adding, "It's a mercy for us in some ways; so good if we do get the right man. Worse than it used to be if we don't. Swings and roundabouts again. But it's still true that

> Two things greater than all things are,
> The first is Love and the second is War."

"I can't imagine such a thing as war, now," mused Gwenna on the bed. "Can you?"

"Oh, vaguely; yes," said Leslie Long. "You know my people, poor darlings, were all in the Army. But the poisonously rich man my sister married says there'll never be any war again, except perhaps among a few dying-out savage races. He does so grudge every ha'penny to the Navy Estimates; and he's quite violent about these useless standing armies! You know he's no sahib. '*His tongue is like a scarlet snake that dances to fantastic tunes.*' However, never mind him. *I'm* the central figure. Which is to be my frock of fascination to-night? '*The White Hope?*' or '*The Yellow Peril?*' You're wearing your white, Taffy. Righto, then I'll put on *this*," decided the elder girl.

She stepped into and drew up about her a moulding sheath of amber-coloured satin that clung to her limbs as a wave clings to a bather—such was the fleeting fashion now defunct! There was a corolla of escholtzia-yellow about the strait hips, a heavy golden girdle dangling.

"There! Now! How's the Bakst view?" demanded Leslie.

She turned slowly, rising on her toes, lifting the glossy black head above a generous display of creamy shoulder-blades; posing, laughing while Gwenna caught her breath.

"Les-lie! . . . And where *did* you get it?"

"Cast-off from an opulent cousin. What I should do if I didn't get a few clothes given me I don't know; I should be sent back by the policeman at the corner, I suppose. One can't *live* at fancy dances at the Albert Hall," said Miss Long philosophically. "Don't I look like a Rilette advertisement on the end page

of *Punch?* Don't I vary? Would anybody think I was the same wispy rag-bag you met in the hall? Nay. 'From Slattern to Show-girl,' that's my gamut. But you, Taff, I've never seen you look really plain. It's partly your curls. You've got the sort of hair some boys have and all women envy. Come here, now, and let's arrange you. I've already been attending to your frock."

The frock which Gwenna was to wear that evening at the dinner-party was one which she had bought, without advice, out of an Oxford Street shop window during a summer sale. It was of satin of which the dead-white gleam was softened by a misty over-dress. So far, so good; but what of the heavy, expensive-looking garniture—sash, knots, and what-nots of lurid colour—with which the French artist's conception had been "brightened up" in this English version?

"Ripped off," explained Leslie Long, firmly, as its owner gazed in horror at a mutilated gown. "No cerise—it's a 'married' colour—No mural decorations for you, Taffy, my child. '*Oh, what a power has white simplicity.*' White, pure white, with these little transparent ruffles that kind Leslie has sewn into the sleeves and round the fichu arrangement for you; and a sash of *very* pale sky-blue."

"Shan't I look like a baby?"

"Yes; the sweetest portrait of one, by Sir Joshua Reynolds."

"Oh! And I'd bought a cerise and *diamanté* hair-ornament."

"Quite imposs. A hair-ornament? One of the housemaids will love it for her next tango tea in Camden Town. As for you, don't dare to touch your curls again—no, nor to put anything round your neck! Take away that bauble!"

"Aren't I even to wear my gold Liberty beads?"

"No! you aren't. Partly because I am, in my hair. Besides, what d'you want them for, with a throat like that? Necklaces are such a mistake," decreed Leslie. "If a girl's got a nice neck, it hides the line; if she hasn't, it shows the defect up!"

"Well," protested Gwenna doubtfully, "but mightn't you say that of anything to wear?"

"Precisely. Still, you can't live up to every counsel of perfection. Not in this climate!"

"You might let me have my thin silver chain, whatever, and my little heart that my Auntie Margie gave me—in fact, I'm going to. It's a mascot," said Gwenna. as she hung the little mother-o'-pearl pendant obstinately about her neck. "There!"

"Very well. Spoil the look of that lovely little dimply hollow you've got just at the base there if you must. A man," said Gwenna's chum with a quick, critical glance, "a man would find that very easy to kiss."

"'Easy!'" said Gwenna, with a quicker blush of anger. "He wouldn't then, indeed!"

"Oh, my dear, I didn't mean that," explained Leslie as she caught up her gloves and wrap and prepared to lead the way out of the room and downstairs to the hall. They would walk as far as the Tube, then book to South Kensington. "All I meant was, that a man would—that is, *might*—er—possibly get the better—ah—of his—say, his natural repugnance to *trying*——"

A little wistfully, Gwenna volunteered: "One never has."

"I know, Taffy. Not yet," said Leslie Long. "But one will. *'Cheer up, girls, he is getting on his boots!'* Ready? Come along."

CHAPTER III

THE EYES OF ICARUS

GWENNA, who was always bubbling over with young curiosity about the fresh *people* whom she was to meet at a party, had never taken overmuch interest in the *places* where the party might be held.

She had not yet reached the age when, for information about new acquaintances, one glances first at their background.

To her the well-appointed though slightly "Art"-y Smith establishment where her friend was taking her to dine was merely "a married house." She took for granted the arrangements thereof. She lumped them all—from the slim, deferential parlour-maid who ushered them through a thickly-carpeted corridor with framed French etchings into a spacious bedroom where the girls removed their wraps, down to the ivory, be-monogrammed pin-tray and powder-box in front of the big mirror—she lumped these all together as "things you have when you're *married*."

It never struck her—it never strikes eight out of ten young girls—that Marriage does not necessarily bring these "things" with their subtle assurance of ease, security, and dignity in its train. She never thought about it. Marriage indeed seemed to her a

sort of dullish postscript to what she imagined must be a thrilling letter.

Why *must* nearly all married people become so stodgy? Gwenna simply couldn't imagine herself getting stodgy—or fat, like this married sister of Leslie Long's, who was receiving her guests in the large upstairs drawing-room into which the two girls were now shown.

This room, golden and creamy, seemed softly aglow. There were standard lamps with huge amber crinolines, bead-fringed; and flowers—yellow roses and white lilies—seemed everywhere.

Leslie Long drew one of the lilies out of a Venetian vase and held it out, like an usher's rod, towards Gwenna as she followed her into the bright, bewildering room, full of people. She announced, "Maudie, here's the stop-gap. Taffy Williams, your hostess."

Her hostess was a version of Leslie grown incredibly matronly. Her auricula-coloured velvet tea-gown looked as if it had been clutched about her at the last moment. (Which in point of fact it had. Mrs. Smith was quite an old-fashioned mother.) Yet from her eyes smiled the indestructible Girl that is embedded in so many a respectable matron, and she looked down very kindly at Gwenna, the cherub-headed, in her white frock.

Mr. Smith, who had a large smooth face and a bald head, gave Gwenna a less cordial glance. Had the truth been known, he was sulking over the non-appearance of the intelligent young woman (from the Poets' Club) whose place was taken by this vacuous-looking flapper (his summing-up of Miss Gwenna Williams). For Gwenna this bald and wedded patriarch of forty-five scarcely existed. She glanced, nervous and fluttered and interested, towards the

group of other guests gathered about the nearer of the two flower-filled fireplaces; a pretty woman in rose-colour and two men of thirty or thereabouts, one of whom (rather stout, with an eye-glass, a black stock-tie, and a lock of brown hair brought down beside his ear like a tiny side-whisker) made straight for Leslie Long.

"Now *don't* attempt to pretend we haven't met," Gwenna heard him say in a voice of flirtatious yearning. "Last time you cut my dance——"

Here the maid announced, from the door, some name. . . . Gwenna, standing shyly, as if on the brink of the party, heard the hostess saying: "We hardly hoped you'd come . . . we know you people always are besieged by invitations——"

"Dear me! All these people seem dreat-fully grand," thought the Welsh girl hastily to herself. "I wonder if it wouldn't have been better, now, if Leslie had left that cerise velvet trimming as it was on my dress?"

Instinctively she glanced about for the nearest mirror. There was a big oval gilt-framed one over the yellow brocaded Empire couch near which Gwenna stood. Her rather bewildered brown eyes strayed from the stranger faces about her to the reflection of the face and figure that she best knew. In the oval of gilded leaves she beheld herself framed. She looked small and very young with her cherub's curls and her soft babyish white gown and that heaven-coloured sash. But she looked pretty. She hoped she did. . . .

Then suddenly in that mirror she caught sight of another face, a face she saw for the first time.

She beheld, looking over her white-mirrored shoulder, the reflection of a young man. Clear-featured, sun-

burnt but blonde, he carried his fair head tilted a little backward, and his eyes—strange eyes!—were looking straight into hers. They were clear and blue and space-daring eyes, with something about them that Gwenna, not recognizing, would have summed up vaguely as "like a sailor's." . . . They were eyes that seemed to have borrowed light and colour from long scanning of far horizons. And now all that keenness of theirs was turned, like a searchlight, to gaze into the wondering, receptive glance of a girl. . . .

Who was this?

Before Gwenna turned to face this stranger with the adventurous, limpid, heaven-blue eyes who had followed their hostess up to her, his gaze seemed to hold hers, as a hand might have held her own, for longer than a minute. . . .

Afterwards she told herself that it seemed, not a minute, but an age before that first look was loosed, before she had turned round to her hostess's, "I want to introduce Mr.——"

(Something or other. She did not catch the name.)

"*He's* nice!" was the young girl's pristine and uncoloured first impression.

Then she thought, "Oh, if it's this one who's going to take me in to dinner, I *am* glad!"

It was he who was to take her in.

For Mr. Smith took the pretty lady whose name, as far as Gwenna was concerned, remained "Mrs. Rose-colour." Her husband, a neutral-tinted being, went in with Mrs. Smith. The man with the side-whisker (who, if he'd been thinner, certainly might have looked rather like the portrait of Chopin) laughed

and chattered to Leslie as they went downstairs together. Gwenna, falling to the lot of the blue-eyed young man as a dinner-partner, altered her mind about her "gladness" almost before she came to her third spoonful of clear soup.

For it seemed as if this young man whose name she hadn't caught were not really "nice" after all! That is, of course, he wasn't "*not* nice." But he seemed stupid! Nothing in him! Nothing to say! Or else very absent-minded, which is just as bad as far as the other people at a party are concerned. Or worse, because it's rude.

Gwenna, taking in every detail of the pretty round table and the lights under the enormous parasol of a pink shade, approving the banked flowers, the silver, the glass, those delicious-looking chocolates in the filigree dishes, the tiny "Steinlen-kitten" menu-holders, Gwenna, dazed yet stimulated by the soft glitter in her eyes, the subdued buzz of talk in her ears, stole a glance at Leslie (who was looking her best and probably behaving her worst) and felt that every prospect was pleasing—except that of spending all this time beside that silent, stodgy young man.

"Perhaps he thinks it's me that's too silly to talk to. I knew Leslie'd made me look too young with this sash! Yes! *indeed* I look like some advertisement for Baby's Outfitting Department," thought Gwenna, vexed. "Or is it because he's the kind of young man that just sits and eats and never really sees or thinks about anything at all?"

Now, had she known it at the time, the thoughts of the blonde and blue-eyed youth beside her were, with certain modifications, something on these lines.

"Dash that stud! Dash the thing. This pin's

going into the back of my neck directly. I know it is. That beastly stud must have gone through a crack in the boards. . . . I shall buy a bushel of 'em to-morrow. Why a man's such a fool as to depend upon one stud . . . I know this pin's going into the back of my neck when I'm not thinking about it. I shall squawk blue murder and terrify 'em into fits. . . . What have we here?" (with a glance from those waking eyes at the menu). "Good. Smiths always do themselves thundering well. . . . Now, who are all these frocks? The Pink 'Un. That's a Mrs. . . . Damsel in the bright yellow lampshade affair about six foot high, that old Hugo's giving the glad eye to. Old Hugo weighs about a stone and a half too much. Does *him*self a lot *too* well. Revolting sight. I wonder if I can work the blood-is-thicker-than-water touch on him for a fiver afterwards? . . . This little girl I've got to talk to, this little thing with the neck and the curly hair. Pretty. *Very* pretty. Knocks the shine out of the others. I know if I turn my head to speak to her, though, that dashed pin will cut adrift and run into the back of my neck. *Dash* that stud. Here goes, though——"

And, stiffly and cautiously moving his head in a piece with his shoulders, he turned, remarking at last to Gwenna in a voice that, though deep-toned and boyish, was almost womanishly gentle, "You don't live in town, I suppose?"

The girl from that remote Welsh valley straightened her back a little. "Yes, I do live in town, indeed!" she returned a trifle defensively. "What made you think I lived in the country?"

"Came up yesterday, I s'pose," the young man told himself as the soup-plates were whisked away.

Gwenna suspected a twinkle in those unusual blue

eyes as he said next, "*Haven't* you lived in Wales, though?"

"Well, yes, I have," admitted Gwenna Williams in her soft, quaint accent, "but how did you know?"

"Oh, I guessed. I've stayed there myself, fishing, one time and another," her neighbour told her. "Used to go down to a farmhouse there, sort of place that's all slate slabs, and china dogs, and light-cakes for tea; ages ago, with my cousin. *That* cousin," and he gave a little jerk of his fair head towards the black-stocked, Trelawney-whiskered young man who was engrossed with Miss Long. "We used to—Ah! *Dash!*" he broke off suddenly and violently. "It's gone down my back now."

Gwenna, startled, gazed upon this stranger who was so good to look at and so extremely odd to listen to. Gone down his back? She simply could not help asking, "What has?"

"That pin," he answered ruefully.

Then he tilted back his fair head and smiled, with deep dimples creasing his sunburnt cheeks and a flash of even white showing between his care-free, strongly-modelled lips. And hereupon Gwenna realized that after all she'd been right. He *was* "nice." He began to laugh outright, adding, "You must think me an absolute lunatic: I'd better tell you what it's all about——"

He took a mouthful of sole and told her, "Fact is, I lost my collar-stud when I was dressing, the stud for the back of my collar; and I had to fasten my collar down at the last minute with a pin. It's been getting on my nerves. Has, really. I've been waiting for it to run into the back of my neck——"

"So that was why he seemed so absent-minded!"

thought Gwenna, feeling quite disproportionately glad and amused over this trifle. She said, "I *thought* you turned as if you'd got a stiff neck! I thought you'd been sitting in a draught."

He made another puzzling remark.

"Draught, by Jove!" he laughed. "It's always fairly *draughty* where I have to sit!"

He went on again to mourn over his collar. "Worse than before, now," he said. "It's going to hitch up to the back of my head, and I shall have to keep wiggling my shoulder-blades about as if I'd got St. Vitus's dance!"

Gwenna felt she would have liked to have taken a tiny safety-pin that there was hidden away under her sky-blue sash, and to have given it to him to fasten that collar securely and without danger of pricking. Leslie, she knew, would have done that. She, Gwenna, would have been too shy, with a perfect stranger—only, now that he'd broken the ice with that collar-stud, so to speak, she couldn't feel as if this keen-eyed, deep-voiced young man were any longer quite a stranger. In her own dialect, he seemed, now, "so homely, like——"

And over the next course he was talking to her about home, about the places where he'd fished in Wales.

"There was one topping little trout-stream," he told her in that deep and gentle voice. "Bubbly as soda-water, green and clear as bottle-glass. Awfully jolly pools under the shade of the branches. You look right down and it's all speckly at the bottom, with brown-and-grey stones and slates and things, under the green water. It's like——"

He was looking straight at her, and suddenly he stopped. He had caught her eyes, full; as he had

caught them before dinner in that mirror. Now that he was so close to them he saw that they were clear and browny-green, with speckles of slate-colour. They were not unlike those pools themselves, by Jove. . . . Almost as if he had been fishing for something out of those depths he still looked down, hard into them. . . . He forgot that he had stopped talking. And then under his own eyes he saw the little thing begin to colour up; blushing from that sturdy white throat of hers to the brow where those thick brown cherub's-curls began to grow. He looked away, hastily. Hastily he said, "It—er—it had a pretty name, that stream. Quite a pronounceable Welsh name, for once: The Dulas."

"Oh, dear me! Do *you* know the Dulas?" cried Gwenna Williams in delight, forgetting that she had just been feeling acutely conscious and shy under the fixed stare of a pair of searching blue eyes. "Why! It's not very far from there that's my home!"

They went on talking—about places. Unconsciously they were leading the whole table after them; the jerkiness went out of sentences; the pitch of the talk rose. It was all a buzz to Gwenna; but when, at the joint, her neighbour turned at last to answer a comment of the rose-coloured lady on his other hand, she amused herself by seeking to find out what all the others were talking about.

"I like some of his things very much. Now, his water-colours at the——" This was Mr. Smith, holding forth about pictures. . . . There appeared to be a good deal of it. Ending up with, "And I know for a fact that he only got two hundred guineas for that; two hundred! Incredible!"

It certainly did seem to Gwenna an incredible amount

of money for a picture, a thing you just hung on a wall and forgot all about. Two hundred guineas! What couldn't she, Gwenna, do with that! Travel all over the place for a year! Go flying every week, at Hendon!

"What an experience! What a change it's made in the whole of English thought!" the pretty, rose-coloured lady was saying earnestly. "We can never be the same again now. It's set us, as a nation, such an entirely new and higher standard——"

This was very solemn, Gwenna thought. What was it about?

"I can't imagine, now, how we can have existed for so long without that point of view," went on Mrs. Rose-colour. "As I say, the first time I ever saw the Russian Ballet——"

The Russian Ballet—Ah! Gwenna had been with Leslie to see that; she had thought herself in a fairy-land of dazzling colour, and of movement as wonderful as that of the flying biplanes. It had been a magic world of enchanted creatures that seemed half-bird, half-flower, who whirled and leaped, light as blown flame, to strangest music. . . . Gwenna had been dazed with delight; but she could not have talked about it as these people talked. "Mr. Rose-colour," Mr. Smith, and Leslie's whiskered young man were all joining in together now.

"You won't deny that a trace of the Morbid——"

"But that hint of savagery is really the attraction," Mr. Smith explained rather pompously. "We over-civilized peoples, who know no savagery in modern life, who have done with that aspect of evolution, I suppose we welcome something so——"

"Elemental——"

"Primitive——"

"Brutal?" suggested Mrs. Rose-colour, appreciatively.

"And that infinitude of gesture——" murmured the whiskered man, eating asparagus.

"Yes, but Isadora——"

"Ah, but Karsavina!"

"You must admit that Nijinski is ultra-romantic——"

"*Define* Romance!"

"Geltzer——"

"Scheherazade——"

Utterly bewildered by the strange words of the language spoken by half London in early summer, Nineteen-fourteen, the young girl from the wilds sought a glimpse of her friend's black-swathed head and vivid, impish face above the banked flowers of the table-centre. Did Leslie know all these words? Was she talking? She was laughing flippantly enough; speaking as nonchalantly.

"Yes, I'm going to the next Chelsea Arts Ball in that all-mauve rig he wears in the "Spectre de la Rose." I am. Watch the effect. 'Oh, Hades, the Ladies! They'll leave their wooden huts!' *You* needn't laugh, Mr. Swayne"—this to the Chopin young man. "*Any*body would be taken in. I can look quite as much of a man as Nijinski does. In fact, far——"

Here suddenly Gwenna's neighbour leaned forward over the table towards his hostess and broke in, his deep, gentle voice carrying above the buzz.

"Mrs. Smith! I say! I beg your pardon," he exclaimed quickly, "but isn't that a baby crying like anything somewhere?"

This remark of the young man's, and that which followed it, surprised and puzzled Gwenna even more

than his curious remark about draughts. Who was he? What sort of a young man was this who always sat in draughts and who could catch the sound of a baby's cry when even its own mother hadn't heard it through the thick *portière*, the doors, the walls and that high-pitched buzz of conversation round about the table?

For Mrs. Smith had fled from the table with a murmured word of apology, and had presently returned just as the ornate fruit-and-jelly mould was being handed round, and Gwenna heard her saying to Mrs. Rose-colour, "Yes, it was. He's off again now. He simply won't go down for Nurse—I always have to rush——"

Gwenna turned to her companion, whose collar was now well up over the back of his neck. Wondering, she said to him, "*Fancy* your hearing that, through all this other noise!"

"Ah, one gets pretty quick at listening to, and placing, noises," he told her, helping himself to the jelly and shrugging his shoulders and that collar at the same time. "It's being accustomed to notice any squeak that oughtn't to be there, you know, in the engines. One gets to hear the tiniest sound, through anything."

Gwenna, more puzzled than before, turned from that delectable pudding on her plate, to this strangely interesting young man beside her. She said: "Are you an engineer?"

"I used to be," he said. "A mechanic, you know, in the shops, before I got to be a pilot."

"A pilot?" She wondered if he thought it rude of her, if it bothered him to be asked questions about himself like this, by just a girl? And still she couldn't help asking yet another question.

She said, " Are you a sailor, then ? "

" Me ? " he said, as if surprised. " Oh, no——"

And then, quite simply and as if it were nothing, he made what was to Gwenna an epic announcement.

" I'm an airman," he said.

She gasped.

He went on. " Belong to a firm that sends me flying. Taking up passengers at Hendon, that sort of thing."

" An airman ? *Are* you ? " was all that Gwenna could for the moment reply. " Oh . . . *Oh !* "

Perhaps her eyes, widening upon the face above her, were more eloquent of what she felt.

That it was to her a miracle to find herself actually sitting next to him ! Actually speaking to one of these scarcely credible beings whom she had watched this afternoon ! *An airman.* . . . There was something about the very word that seemed mysterious, uncanny. Was it because of its comparative newness in the speech of man ? Perhaps, ages ago, primitive maids found something as arresting in the term " *A seaman* " ? But this was an airman ! It was his part to ride the Winged Victory, the aeroplane that dared those sapphire heights above the flying-ground ? Oh ! And she had been chattering to him about the slate-margined brooks and the ferny glens of her low-lying valley, just as if he'd been what this ingenuous maid called to herself " *Any* young man " who had spent holidays fishing in Wales ? She hadn't known ! *That* was why he had those queer, keen eyes : blue and reckless, yet measuring.

Not a sailor's, not a soldier's . . . but the eyes of Icarus ! . . .

" I—I never heard your name," said Gwenna, a little breathless, timid. " Which is it, please ? "

For reply he dabbed a big, boyish finger down on

the slender name-card among the crumbs of his bread. "Here you are," he said, "Dampier; Paul Dampier."

So whirling and bewildered was Gwenna's mind by this time that she scarcely wondered over the added surprise. This, she just realized, was the name she had first heard bellowed aloud through the megaphone from the judge's stand. She hardly remembered then that a photograph of this same aviator was tossed in among her wash-leather gloves, velvet hair-bands, and her handkerchief-sachet in the top right-hand drawer of her dressing-table at the Club. Certainly she did not remember at this minute what she had said, laughing, over that portrait, to her two friends on the flying-ground.

There, she had admired the machine; that un-Antæus-like thing that was not itself until it had shaken off the fetters of Earth from its skids and wheels. Here, she marvelled over the man; *for he was part of it.* He was its skill and its will. He was the planner of those curves and bankings and soarings, those volplanés that had left, as it were, their lovely lines visible in the air. His Icarian mind had determined—his large but supple body had executed them.

A girl could understand that, without understanding how it was all done. Those big, boyish hands of his, of course, would grasp certain mechanisms; his feet, too, would be busy; his knees—every inch of his lithe length and breadth—every muscle of him; yes! even to the tiny muscles that moved his wonderful eyes.

"I saw you, then," she told him, in a dazed little voice. "I was at Hendon this afternoon! It was the first time in my life. . . "

"Really?" he said. "What did you think of it all?"

"Oh, splendid!" she said, ardently, though vaguely.

How she longed to be able to talk quickly and easily to anybody, as Leslie could! How stupid he—the Airman—must think her! A little shakily she forced herself to go on: "I did think it so wonderful, but I can't explain, like. Ever. I *never* can. But——"

Perhaps, again, she was explaining better than she knew, with that small, eager face raised to his.

"Oh!" she begged. "Do *tell* me about it!"

He laughed. "Tell you what? Isn't much to tell."

"Oh, yes, there must be! You tell me," she urged softly, unconscious that her very tone was pure and concentrated flattery. "Do!"

And with another short, deprecating laugh, another shrug to his collar, the boy began to "tell" her things, though the girl did not pretend to understand. She listened to that voice, strong and deep, but womanishly gentle. She forgot that by rights she ought to pay some attention to her neighbour, the imitation Chopin. She listened to this other.

Words like "*controls*," "*pockets*," "*yawing*" went in at one of the ears under her brown curls and out at the other, leaving nothing but a quivering atmosphere of "the wonderfulness" of it all. Presently she saw those hands of his, big, sensitive, clever, arranging forks and spoons upon the sheeny tablecloth before her.

"Imagine that's your machine," he said. "Now you see there are three possible movements. *This*"—he tilted a dessert-knife from side to side—"*and this*"—he dipped it—"*and this*, which is yawing—you understand?"

"No!" she confessed, with the quickest little gesture. "I couldn't understand those sort of things. I shouldn't

want to. What I really want to know is—well, about *it*, like!"

"About what?"

"About *flying!*"

He laughed outright again. "But, that *is* flying!"

She shook her head. "No, not what I mean. That's all—machinery!" She pronounced the word "machinery" with something almost like disdain. He looked at her as if puzzled.

"Sorry you aren't interested in machinery," he said quite reprovingly, "because, you know, that's just what I *am* interested in. I'm up to my eyes in it just now, pretty well every minute that I can spare. In fact I've got a machine—only the drawings for it, of course, but——"

"Do you mean you've *invented* one?"

"Oh, I don't know about 'invent.' Call it an improvement. It should be about as different from the lumbering concern you saw me go up in to-day as that's different from—say from one of those old Cambrian Railway steam engines," he declared exultantly. "It's——"

Here, he plunged into another vortex of mysterious jargon about "automatic stability," about "skin friction," and a hundred other matters that left the listening girl as giddy as a flight itself might have done.

What she did understand from all this was that here, after all, in the Machine, must be the secret of all the magic. This was what interested the Man. An inventor, too, he talked as if he loved to talk of it—even to her; his steel-blue eyes holding her own. Perhaps he didn't even see her, she thought; perhaps he scarcely remembered there was a girl there, leaving strawberries and cream untasted on an apple-green plate, listening

with all her ears, with all of *herself*—as he, with all of himself, guided a machine. Ah, he talked of a just-invented machine as in the same tone Gwenna had heard young mothers talk of their new-born babies.

This was what he lived for!

"Yes," concluded the enthusiast with a long sigh, "if I could get that completed, and upon the market——"

"Well?" Gwenna took up softly; ignorant, but following his every change of tone. "Why can't you?"

"Why not? For the usual reason that people who are keen to get things done can't do 'em," the boy said ruefully, watching that responsive shadow cloud her face as he told her. "It's a question of the dashed money."

"Oh!" said the girl more softly still. "I see."

So he, too, even he knew what it was to find that fettering want of guineas clog a soaring impulse? What a *shame*, she thought. . . .

He thought (as many another young man with a Subject has thought of some rapt and girlish listener!) that the little thing was jolly intelligent, *for* a girl, more so than you were supposed to expect of such a pretty face—— Pretty? Come to look at her she was quite lovely. Made that baggage in the yellow dress and the Mrs. in the Pink look like a couple of half-artificial florists' blooms by the side of a lily-of-the-valley freshly-plucked from some country garden, sappy and sturdy, and sweet. And her skin was like the bit of mother-of-pearl she was wearing as a heart-shaped locket.

Quite suddenly he said to her: "Look here! Should you care to go up?"

Gwenna gasped.

The whole room, the bright table and the chattering guests seemed now to whirl about her in a circle of

shiny mist—as that aeroplane propeller had whirled. . . . Care to go up? *"Care!"* Would she? Would she *not?*

"Oh——" she began.

But this throbbing moment was the moment chosen by her hostess to glance smilingly at Mrs. Rose-colour and to rise, marshalling the women from the room.

CHAPTER IV

THE SONG OF ALL THE AGES

"NOW isn't life *extraordinary?*" thought Gwenna Williams, incoherently in the drawing-room as she sat on the yellow Empire sofa under the mirror, holding a tiny coffee-cup and answering the small-talk of kindly Mrs. Smith. Fancy, before this afternoon I'd never seen any flying! And now on the very same evening I'm asked to go flying myself! Me! Just like that girl who was with him in the race! (I wonder is she a great friend of his.) I wonder when he'll take me? Will he come and settle about it—oh, I do hope so!—before we all have to go away?"

But there was no chance of "settling" this for some time after the door opened to a little commotion of bass laughter, a trail of cigar-scent, and the entrance of the man.

Mrs. Rose-colour, with some coquettish remark that Gwenna didn't catch, summoned the tall airman to the yellow-brocaded pouffe at her feet. Her husband crossed over to Gwenna (who suddenly discovered that she hated him) and began talking Welsh folk-songs. Whereupon Hugo Swayne, fondling his Chopin curl, asked Leslie, who towered above him near the piano, if she were going to sing.

"I'm in such a mood," he told her "to listen to something rawly and entirely modern!"

"You shall, then," agreed Miss Long, suddenly demure. "D'you know the—er—*Skizzen Macabres*, those deliciously perverse little things of Wedekind's? They've been quite well translated. . . . Righto, my dear"—in answer to a nervous glance from her sister, "I'll only sing the *primmer* verses. The music is by that wonderful new Hungarian person—er—Sjambok."

Her tall golden figure reflected itself in the ebony mirror of the piano as Leslie, with a malicious gleam in the tail of her eye, sat down.

"I shan't sing for *him*, all the same," she thought. "I shall sing for Taffy and that Air-boy. I bet I can hit on something that *they'll* both like . . . Yes. . . ."

And she struck the first chords of her accompaniment.

And what was it, this "crudely modern" song that Leslie had chosen for the sake of the two youngest people present at that party?

There is a quintette of banjo-players and harpists who are sometimes "on" at the Coliseum in London, but who are more often touring our Colonies from Capetown to Salter, Sask. And wherever they may go, it seems, they bring down the house with that same song. For, to the hearts of exiled and homesick and middle-aged toilers that simple tune means England, Home and Beauty still. They waltzed to it, long ago in the Nineteenth Century. They "turned over" for some pretty girl who "practised" it. So, when they hear it, they encore it still, with a lump in their throats. . . .

It was the last verse of this song that drifted in Leslie's deep contralto, across this more enlightened

drawing-room audience of Nineteen-fourteen. Softly the crooning, simply phrased melody stole out :

" Even to-day we hear Love's song of yore !
Low in our hearts it rings for evermore.
Footsteps may falter, weary grow the way,
Still we can hear it at the close of day ! "

—" and it's at least as pleasant as any of their beastly ' artistic ' music,". thought Leslie, rebelliously, as she sang :

" Still to the end," (chord) *" while Life's dim shadows fall,*
Love will be found the sweetest song of all ! "

She ended in a ripple of arpeggios, triumphantly, for she had glanced at the two youngest people in the room. Little Gwenna's eyes were full of the facile tears of her race ; and the Dampier boy's face was grave with enjoyment. Alas, for the musical taste of these two ! They *had* liked the old song. . . .

The enlightened others were puzzled for a moment. *What* was that thing——?

Mr. Swayne explained languidly. " Priceless old ditty entitled ' Love's Old Sweet Song.' A favourite of the dear late Queen's, long before any of US were thought of. Miss Long has been trying to pull our legs with it ! "

" Oh, Leslie, dear, you are so amusing always," said Mrs. Rose-colour, turning with her little superior smile to the singer. " But won't you sing something *really ?* "

Leslie's quick black eyes caught a glance of half-conscious, half-inarticulate sympathy that was passing between the youngest girl in the room and the man who had taken her in to dinner. It was as if they'd said, together, " I wish she'd sing again. I wish she'd sing something like *that* again. . . ."

They were alone in their wish!

For now Mrs. Smith sat down and played something. Something very long. . . .

And still what Gwenna longed to happen did not happen. In spite of that glance of sympathy just now, it did not happen.

The Airman, sitting there on that brocaded *pouffe*, his long legs stretched out over the soft putty-coloured carpet, did *not* come up to her to speak again of that so miraculously proffered flight in his aeroplane. He went on being talked to by Mrs. Rose-colour.

And when that pretty lady and her husband rose to go, the young girl in her corner had a very blank and tense moment. For she heard those people offer to take Mr. Dampier with them and drop him at his rooms. Oh, that would mean that she, Gwenna, wouldn't have another word with him! He'd go! And his invitation had been unanswered!

"Care to go up?" he'd said—and Gwenna hadn't even had time to tell him "Yes!"

Ah, it would have been too good to be true!——

Very likely he'd forgotten what he'd said at dinner. . . .

He hadn't meant it. . . .

He'd thought she'd meant "No." . .

He was going now——

But no. To her unspeakable relief she heard his deep "Thanks awfully, but I'm going on with Hugo presently. Taking him to meet some people at the Aero Club."

Now, just imagine that! thought the country girl. Here it was already half-past ten at night; but he was going on to meet some more people somewhere else. This wonderful party, which had marked an

epoch in her life, was nothing to him ; it was just the beginning of the evening. And, after days in the skies, all his evenings were like this ! Hadn't Mrs. Smith said when he came in, " We know you are besieged with invitations ? " Oh, the inconceivably interesting life that was his ! Why, why was Gwenna nothing but a girl, a creature who, even nowadays, had to stay within the circumscribed limits where she was put, who could not see or be or do *anything*, really ! Might as well be born a *tortoise*. . . .

Here the voice of Mr. Hugo Swayne (to which she'd paid scant attention so far) said something about taking Miss Long and her friend up to Hampstead first, and that Paul could come along.

Gwenna, enraptured, discovered that this meant in his, Mr. Swayne's, car. The four of them were to motor up to her and Leslie's Club together. All that lovely long drive ?

But though " lovely," that journey back to Hampstead, speeding through the broad, uncrowded streets that the lights showed smooth and polished as a ballroom floor, with the giant shadows of plane-tree leaves a-dance upon the pavement—that journey was unbelievably, relentlessly short.

Mr. Swayne seemed to tear along ! He was driving, with Leslie, gay and talkative and teasing, beside him in front. The younger girl sat behind with his cousin. The Airman was hatless ; and he wore a light loose overcoat of which the big sleeve brushed the black satin of Gwenna's wrap.

" Warm enough ? " he asked, gently, and (as carefully as if she'd been some old invalid, she thought) he tucked a rug about her. Eagerly Gwenna longed for him to return to that absorbing question he'd put to her at

the dinner-table. But there seemed scarcely time to say a single word before, with a jarring of brakes, the car drew up in the slanting road before the big square block of the Club. The arc-lights blazed into the depths of the tall chestnut-trees beside the street, while the four young people stood for a moment clustered together on the asphalt walk before the glass-porch.

"All over now," thought Gwenna with quite a ridiculously sharp little pang as good-nights and good-byes were said.

Oh! Wasn't he going to say anything else? About the flying? *She* couldn't!

He was holding her hand (for good-night) while Mr. Swayne still laughed with Leslie.

"Look here," the Airman said abruptly. "About that flying——"

"Yes! Oh, yes!" Gwenna returned in a breathless little flurry. There mustn't be any *mistake* about what she wished. She looked up into his holding eyes once more, and said quiveringly, "I would so love it!"

"You would. Right," he said, and seemed to have forgotten that they had shaken hands, and that he had not yet loosed her fingers from his large and hearty grip. He shook hands again. "Then I'll come round and fix it up——"

And the next instant, it seemed, he was whirled away from her again, this Stranger who had dropped into the middle of her life as it were from the skies which were his hunting-ground. There was the noise of a retreating car droning down the hill (not unlike the receding drone of a biplane in full flight), then the grating of a key in the lock of the Club door. . . .

Gwenna sighed. Then she went upstairs, humming

softly, without knowing what the tune was, Leslie's song :

" Once in the dear, dead days beyond recall——"

Leslie followed her into her room where she turned up the gas.

" I'll undo you, Taffy, shall I ? . . . Enjoyed yourself rather, after all, didn't you ? " said the elder girl, adding quickly, " What's the matter ? "

For Gwenna before the glass stood with a dismayed look upon her face. Her hand was up to her round white throat, touching the dimpled hollow where there had rested—where there rested no longer—that mother-of-pearl pendant.

" It's gone," she exclaimed ruefully.

" What has, child ? What have you dropped ? "

Gwenna, still with her hand at her throat, explained, " I've lost my heart."

CHAPTER V

THE WORKADAY WORLD

THE day after the dinner-party was spent by Gwenna metaphorically, at least, in the clouds. By her vivid day-dreams she was carried off, as Ganymede was carried by the eagle, sky-high; she felt the rush of keen air on her face; she saw the khaki-green flying-ground beneath her with the clustered onlookers, as small as ants. And—thus she imagined it—she heard that megaphone announcement:

" Ladies and gentul MEN!
Mis ter Paul Dampier on
a Maurice Farman bi plane
ac companied by Miss Williams!"

with the sound of it dying down, faintly, below her.

Then in her musing mind she went over and over what had already happened. Those throbbing moments when her new friend had said, " Look here! Would you care to come up? " and, " Then I'll come up here and fix it——"

Would he? Oh, when would he? It was of course hardly to be thought that this flying-man

(" besieged with invitations " as he was) would come to ratify his offer on Sunday, the very day after he'd made it. Too much to expect. . . .

Therefore that Sunday Gwenna Williams refused to go out, even on the Heath for the shortest loitering stroll. Leslie Long, with an indescribable look that the younger girl did not catch, went out without her. Gwenna stayed on the green bench in the small, leafy garden at the back of the Club reading and listening, listening for the sound of the bell at the front door, or for the summons to the telephone.

None came, of course.

Also, of course, no note to make an appointment to go flying appeared at that long, crowded breakfast-table of the Club on Monday morning for Miss Gwenna Williams.

That, too, she could hardly have expected.

Quite possibly he'd forgotten that the appointment had ever been made. A young man of that sort had got so many things to think about. So many people to make appointments with. So many other girls to take up.

" I wonder if he's promised to go up again soon with that girl called Muriel," she thought. " Sure to know millions of girls——"

And it was in a very chastened mood of reaction that Gwenna Williams, typist—now dressed in the business-girl's uniform of serge costume, light blouse, and small hat—left her Club that morning. She walked down the sunny morning road to the stopping-place of the motor-omnibuses and got on to a big scarlet " 24 " bus, bound for Charing Cross and her day's work.

The place where she worked was a huge new building in process of construction on the south side of the Embankment near Westminster Bridge.

Above the slowly sliding tides of the river, with its barges and boats, there towered several courses of granite blocks, clean as a freshly-split kernel. In contrast to them were the half demolished, dingy shells of houses on either side, where the varied squares of wallpaper and the rusting, floorless fireplaces showed where one room had ended and the next begun. The scaffolding rose above the new pile like a mighty web. Above this again the enormous triangular lattice rose so high that it seemed like a length of ironwork lace stretched out on two crochet-needles against the blue-grey and hot vault of the London sky,

As she passed the entrance Gwenna's eyes rose to this lattice.

"It looks almost as high up in the air as one could fly in that biplane," she thought. "Oh, to be right *up!* Looking down on everything, with the blue *beneath one* instead of only above!"

She crossed the big yard, which was already vocal with the noises of chipping and hammering, the trampling and the voices of men. Two of them—the genial young electrician called Grant and the Yorkshire foreman who was a regular father to his gang, nodded good-morning to the youngest typist as she passed. She walked quickly past the stacks of new timber and the gantries and travelling cranes (plenty of machinery here; it ought to please Mr. Dampier, since he'd said that was what he was interested in!). One great square of the hewn granite was swinging in mid-air from a crane as she left the hot sunlight and noise outside and entered the door of the square,

corrugated iron building that held the office where she worked.

To reach it she had to pass through the clerk-of-the-works' offices, with long drawing-benches with brass handled drawers beneath, full of plans, and elevations. These details seemed mysteriously, tantalizingly incomprehensible and yet irritating to Gwenna's feminine mind. She was imaginative enough to realize that all these details, these "man's-things," from the T-squares on the benches to the immense iron safe in the corner, seemed to put her, Gwenna, "in her place." She was merely another detail in the big whole of man's work that was going on here. The place made her feel tiny, unimportant. She went on to the light and airy room, smelling of new wood and tracing-paper, the extension of the clerk-of-the-works' office that she shared with her two colleagues.

In the centre of this room there was a large square table with a telephone, a telephone-book, various other books of reference and a shallow wicker basket for letters. Besides this there were the typing tables for each of the three girl-clerks. Gwenna's and Miss Baker's were side by side. The German girl sat nearest to the window that gave the view up the river, with Lambeth Bridge and the Houses of Parliament looming grey and stately against the smiling June sky, and a distant glimpse of Westminster Abbey. On the frame of the pane just above her Miss Baker had fastened, with drawing-pins, two photographs. One was a crude coloured postcard of a red-roofed village among pine-forests. The other was a portrait of a young man, moustached and smiling under a spiked German helmet; across this photograph ran the autograph, "*Karl Becker.*" Thus the blue and

guileless eyes of this young foreigner in our midst could rest upon mementoes of her Fatherland and her family any time she raised her blonde head from bending over her work. Both girls looked up this morning as Gwenna, the last arrival, came in. They scolded her good-naturedly because she'd brought none of those chocolates she'd promised from the dinner-table. They asked how she'd enjoyed herself at that party?

It would have been presumably natural to the young Welsh girl to have broken out into a bubblingly excited —"And, girls! *Who* d'you suppose I sat next? A real live airman! *And,* my dears!" (with a rapturous gasp), "who should it be but the one I bought the phóto of on Saturday! You know; the one you called my young man—Mr. Dampier—Paul Dampier—Yes, but wait; that isn't all. Just fancy! He talked to me yards and yards about his new aeroplane, and I say, *what* do you think! This was the best. He's asked me to come up one day—yes, indeed! He's going to take me flying—with him!"

But, as it was, Gwenna said not one word of all this. She could not have explained why, even to herself. Only she replied to Miss Butcher's, "What was the party like?" with a flavourless, "Oh, it was all right, thanks."

That sounded *so* English, she thought!

She had a dull day at the office. Dry-as-dust letters and specifications, builders' quantities, and so on, to type out. Tiresome calls on the telephone that had to be put through to the other office. . . .

Never before had she seemed to mind the monotony of those clicking keys and that "*I'll inquire. Hold the line, please.*" Never before had she found herself

irritated by the constant procession of men who were in and out all day; including Mr. Grant, who sometimes seemed to *make* errands to talk to Miss Butcher, but who never stayed for more than a moment, concluding invariably with the cheerful remark, "Well! Duty calls, I must away." Men seemed actually to *enjoy* "duty," Gwenna thought. At least the men here did. All of them, from Mr. Henderson in the other office to the brown-faced men in the yard with their shirt-sleeves rolled up above tattooed arms, seemed to be "keen" on the building, on the job in hand. They seemed glad to be together. Gwenna wondered how they could. . . .

To-day she was all out of tune. She was quite cross when, for the second time, Albert, the seventeen-year old Cockney office-boy, bustled in, stamping a little louder than was strictly necessary on the echoing boards. He rubbed his hands together importantly, demanding in a voice that began in a bass roar and ended in a treble squeak, "Those specifications, miss. Quick, too, or you'll hear about it!"

"Goodness *me*, what an ugly way you London boys do have of talking!" retorted the Welsh girl pettishly. "*Sut*-ch an accent!"

The rebuked Albert only snorted with laughter as he took her sheaf of papers. Then, looking back over his shoulder at the pretty typist perched on the edge of the centre table to refill her fountain pen, he added in his breaking treble, "Don't you sit on that tyble, Miss! *Sittin' on the tyble's s'posed to mean you want to be kissed*, and it looks so bad! Don't it, Miss Butcher? There's other ways of gittin' orf than that, isn't there?"

"Outside!" snapped Miss Butcher, blushing, as the boy stumped away.

Gwenna sighed angrily and longed for lunch-time, so that she could get out

At one o'clock, an hour after the buzzer had sounded for the mid-day meal of the yard-men, the other two girls in the office would not even come out for a breath of air. They had brought fruit and cake. They made Bovril (with a kettle of hot water begged from the fatherly foreman) and lunched where they'd sat all the morning. Miss Butcher, munching, was deep in a library-book lent to her by the young electrician. Miss Baker counted stitches in a new pattern for a crochet-work *Kante,* or length of fine thread insertion. It was not unlike the pattern of the iron trellis above the scaffolding, that tapered black against the sky ; man's fancy-work.

What hideously tame things women had to fill their lives with, Gwenna thought as she sat in the upper window of her tea-shop at the corner of the Embankment. She watched the luncheon-time crowd walking over Westminster Bridge. So many of these people were business-girls just like herself and the Butcher and the Baker ! Would anything more amusing ever happen to them, or to her ?

But that German girl, Gwenna thought, would stare to hear her work called " hideous " or " tame." It was her greatest interest. Already, she'd told Gwenna, her bottom drawer at her boarding-house was crammed with long, rolled-up crochet-work strips of white or creamy lace. There were also her piles of tray-cloths, petticoat flounces and chemise-tops, all hand-embroidered and bemonogrammed by Miss Baker herself. She was not engaged to be married, but, as she'd artlessly said, " *Something* a young girl can have always ready."

Day-dreams in crochet !

" I'd rather never fall in love than have it all spoilt by mixing it up with such a lot of sewing and cookery that it wouldn't get disentangled, like," thought the dreamy, impatient Gwenna. She returned, to find the German girl measuring her crochet lace against her arm and crying, " Since Saturday I have made till there ? " . . .

Then Miss Baker turned to her German version of an English trade firm's letter. Miss Butcher unfastened another packet of stationery. Miss Williams fetched a number of envelopes from the inner office to be addressed. . . .

Would the afternoon *never* come to an end ?

CHAPTER VI

THE INVITATION

AT last six o'clock found her, released from the day's work and back at her Club.

But still, still there was no envelope addressed to Miss Gwenna Williams stuck up in the criss-cross tapes of the green-baize-covered letter-board in the hall.

She went upstairs rather slowly to take off her hat. On the landing the voice of Leslie Long called to her from the bathroom.

"Come in here, Taffy. I'm washing blouses. I want to tell you some news."

Gwenna entered the steamy bathroom, to find her chum's tall figure bent in two over the bath and up to its bare elbows in suds of Lux.

"I say, child, you know your locket that you lost at my sister's?" announced Leslie. "It's all right. It's been found."

"Has it?" said Gwenna, not very enthusiastically. "Did I leave it in Mrs. Smith's room?"

"You didn't. You left it in Hugo Swayne's car," said Leslie, wringing out the wet handful of transparent net that would presently serve her as a garment. "That young man came up about half an hour ago to tell you."

"Mr. Swayne did? How kind of him."

"Yes, wasn't it? But not of Mr. Swayne," said Leslie, wringing. "It was—just let out the water and

turn me on some fresh hot, will you ?—It was the other one that came ; the aviator boy."

" What ? " cried Gwenna sharply. " Mr. Dampier ? "

" Yes. Your bird-man. He came up here—in full plumage and song ! Nice grey suit—rather old ; brown boots awfully well cleaned—by himself ; blue tie, very expensive Burlington Arcade one—lifted from his cousin Hugo, I bet," enlarged Leslie, spreading the blouse out over the white china edge of the bath. " I met him at the gate just as I got back from my old lady's. He asked for my friend—meaning you. Hadn't grasped your name. He came in for ten minutes. But he couldn't wait, Taffy, so——"

Here, straightening herself, Leslie suddenly stopped. She stopped at the sight of the small, blankly dismayed face with which her chum had been listening to this chatter.

And Gwenna, standing aghast against the frosted glass panes of the bathroom door, pronounced, in her softest, most agitated Welsh accent, an everyday Maid's Tragedy in just six words :

" *He came ! When I was out !* '

" He was awfully sorry——"

But Gwenna, seeming not to hear her friend, broke out : " He *said* he'd come and settle about taking me flying, and there was I *think*-ing he'd forgotten all about it, and then he did come after all, and I wasn't here Oh, *Leslie !*——"

Leslie, sitting on the edge of the bath, gave her a glance that was serious and whimsical, rueful and tender, all at once.

" Yes, you can't understand," mourned Gwenna, " but I *did* so want to go up in an aeroplane for once in my life ! I'd set my heart on it, Leslie, ever since he said about it. It's only now I see how badly I wanted

it," explained the younger girl, flushed with emotion, and relapsing into her Welshiest accent, as do all the Welsh in their moments of stress. "And *now* I shan't get another chance. I know I shan't——"

And such was the impetus of her grief that Leslie could hardly get her to listen to the rest of the news that should be balm for this wound of disappointment; namely, that Mr. Dampier was going to make an appointment with both girls to come and have tea with him at his rooms, either on Saturday or Sunday.

"He'll write to you," concluded Leslie Long, "and let you know which. I said we'd go either day, Taffy."

Gwenna, caught up into delight again from the lowest depths of disappointment, could hardly trust herself to speak. Surely Leslie must think her a most *awful* baby, nearly crying because she'd had an outing postponed! So the young girl (laughing a little shakily) put up quite a plucky fight to treat it all as quite a trifle. . . .

Even the next morning at breakfast she took it quite casually that there was a note upon her plate stamped with the address of the Aero Club. She even waited a moment before she opened it and read in a handwriting as small as if it had been traced by a crow-quill:

"Monday night.

"DEAR MISS WILLIAMS,

"Will you and Miss Long come to tea with me at my place about 4.30 on Sunday. I find I shall not have to go to Hendon on that day. I'll come and call for you if I may.

"Yours sincerely,

"P. DAMPIER."

"At last!" thought Gwenna to herself, rather breathlessly, as she put the note back into the envelope. "Now he'll settle about when I'm to go flying with him. Oh! I do, *do* hope there's nothing going to get in the way of that!"

CHAPTER VII

A BACHELOR'S TEA-PARTY

THE first of a series of " things that got in the way " of Gwenna's making an appointment to go flying occurred on that Sunday afternoon, when Leslie and she were to have tea at Paul Dampier's place.

" A mixture of chaos and comfy chairs, I expect; ash everywhere, and *beastly* cakes. (I know these bachelor tea-parties.) That," Leslie said, " is what his ' place ' will be like."

Gwenna, as usual, hadn't wasted any thoughts over this. She had been too full of what their host himself would say and do—about the flying. She was all ready, in the white dress, the white hat with the wings, half an hour after Sunday mid day dinner at the Ladies' Club. But it was very nearly half-past four by the time Mr. Dampier did come, as he had promised, to fetch the two girls.

He came in the car that had driven them back on the night of the dinner-party.

And he was hurried, and apologetic for his lateness. He even seemed a little shy. This had the effect of making Gwenna feel quite self-possessed as she took the seat beside him (" I hate sitting by the driver, really. Makes me *so* nervous! " Leslie had declared) and

inquired whether he borrowed his cousin's car any time he had visitors.

"Well, but Hugo's *got* everything," he told her, with a twinkle, "so I always borrow anything of his that I can collar!"

"Studs, too?" asked Gwenna, quickly.

"Oh, come! I didn't think it of you. *What* a pun!" he retorted.

She coloured a little, shy again, hurt. But he turned his head to look at her, confided to her: "It was *on* the chest-of-drawers, all the time!"

And, as the car whizzed westwards, they laughed together. That dinner-table incident of the collar—or collared—stud brought, for the second time, a sudden homely glow of friendly feeling between this boy and girl.

She thought, "He's just as easy to get on with as if he were another girl, like Leslie——"

For always, at the beginning of things, the very young woman compares her first man-friend with the dearest girl-chum she has known.

—"Or as if he were just nobody, instead of being so wonder-ful, and an airman, good gracious!"

Appropriately enough for an airman, his place seemed to be nearly on the house-tops of a block of buildings near Victoria Street.

The lift carried them up past six landings and many boards inscribed with names of firms. It stopped at the seventh story, almost directly opposite a cream-coloured door with a small, old-fashioned brass knocker, polished like gold.

Paul Dampier tapped sharply at it.

The door was opened by a thick-set man in an excellent suit of clothes and with the face of a wooden sphinx.

"Tea as soon as you can, Johnson," said the young Airman over his shoulder, as the trio passed in.

The long sitting-room occupied half the flat and its windows took up the whole of one side. It was to these open windows that Gwenna turned.

"Oh, what a view!" she cried, looking out, enraptured at the height and airiness, looking past the leads, with their wooden tubs of standard laurel-bushes, among which pigeons were strutting and bridling and pecking crumbs. She looked down, down, at the bird's-eye view of London, spread far below her in a map of grey roofs and green tree-tops under a soft mist of smoke that seemed of the clouds themselves.

"Oh, can't you see for miles!" exclaimed Gwenna. "There's St. Paul's, looks like a big grey soap-bubble, coming up out of the mist! Oh, you can see between a crack in the houses, our place at Westminster! It's like a cottage from here! Oh, and that iron lacey thing on the roof! Even this must be something like being up in an aeroplane, I should think! Look, Leslie!"

Miss Long seemed more engrossed in looking round Mr. Dampier's bachelor sitting-room. It was incredibly luxurious compared to what she'd expected. The polished floor was black and shiny as the wood of the piano at the further end, the Persian rugs softly brilliant. In the middle of the Adams mantelpiece simpered an exquisite Chelsea shepherdess; to the left and right of her there stood squat toys in ivory, old slender-stalked champagne-glasses holding sweet-peas. And upon the leaf-brown walls were decorations that seemed complacently to draw attention to the catholic taste of their owner. A rare eighteenth-century print of Tom Jones upon his knees, asking "forgiveness" of his Sophia, hung just above a Futurist's grimace in paint; and there was

a frieze of ultra-modern French fashion-designs, framed in *passe-partout*, from the "*Bon Ton.*"

"What a—what a surprising number of pictures you have, Mr. Dampier," said Leslie, mildly. "Hasn't he, Taffy?"

Gwenna, turning at last from the window, realized dimly that this sophisticated room did seem somehow out of keeping as an eyrie for this eagle. The view outside, yes! But these armchairs? And she wouldn't have thought that he would have bothered to have things *pretty*, like this——

"And what a lot of books you've got," she said. For the wall opposite to the windows was taken up by bookshelves, set under a trophy of swords of out-of-date patterns, and arranged with some thought.

The top shelves held volumes of verse, and of plays, from Beaumont and Fletcher to Galsworthy. The Russian novelists were ranged together; also the French. There was a corner for Sudermann and Schnitzler. A shelf further down came all the English moderns, and below that all the *Yellow Books*, a long blue line of all the *English Reviews*, from the beginning; a stack of *The New Age*, and a lurid pink-covered copy of *Blast*.

But before Gwenna could wonder further over these possessions of this young man, more incongruous possessions were brought in by the Sphinx-faced man-servant; a tea-table of beaten copper, a peasant-embroidered cloth, a tea-service of old Coalport; with a silver spirit-kettle, with an iced cake, with toast, and wafer, bread-and-butter and cress-sandwiches and Parisian *petits-fours* that all seemed, as the young girl put it simply to herself, "So unlike *him!*"

Her chum had already guessed the meaning of it all.

The Dampier boy's rooms? *His* library and ornaments? Ah, no. He'd never read one of all those

books there. Not he! And these were not the type of "things" he'd buy, even if he'd had the money to throw away, thought Leslie. It was no surprise to that young woman when the legitimate owner of this lavishly appointed *garçonnière* made his sudden appearance in the middle of tea.

The click of a latchkey outside. Two masculine voices in the hall. Then the door was thrown open.

There walked in a foreign-looking young man, with bright dark eyes and a small moustache, followed by Mr. Hugo Swayne, attired in a Victorian mode that, as Leslie put it afterwards, "cried '*Horse, horse!*' where there was no horse." His tall bowler was dove-grey; his black stock allowed a quarter-inch of white collar to appear; below his striking waistcoat dangled a bunch of seals and a fob. This costume Leslie recognized as a revival of the Beggarstaff Touch. Gwenna wondered why this young man seemed always to be in fancy dress? Leslie could have told her that Mr. Swayne's laziness and vanity had led him to abandon himself on the coast of Bohemia, where he had not been born. His father had been quite a distinguished soldier in Egypt. His father's son took things more easily at the Grafton Gallery and the Café Royal and Artists' Clubs. He neither painted, wrote, nor composed, but his life was set largely among flatterers who did these things—after a fashion.

He came in saying, "Now this is where I live when I'm——"

He broke off with a start at the sight of the party within. The girls turned to him with surprised and smiling greeting.

Paul Dampier, fixing him with those blue eyes, remarked composedly, "Hullo, my dear chap. Have

some tea, won't you? I'll ring for Johnson to bring in two more cups."

"That will be very nice," said Hugo Swayne, rising to the occasion with all the more grace because he was backed up by a tiny understanding glance from Miss Long. And he introduced his young Frenchman by a name that made Leslie exclaim, "Why! You are that Post-Impressionist painter, aren't you?"

"Not I, mademoiselle, but my brother," returned Hugo's French friend, slowly and very politely. His dark face was simple and intelligent as that of a nice child; he sat up as straight in his chair as he talked. "It is for that Mr. Swayne, who is admirer of my brother's pictures, is so amiable for to show me London. Me, I am not artiste. I am ingénieur only."

"'Only'!" thought Gwenna over her teacup.

Surely anyone should be proud of being an engineer, considering that Mr. Dampier had thus begun *his* career; he who was now in what the romantic girl considered the First of All Professions? Perhaps her attitude towards the Airman as such was noted by the Airman's cousin. Hugo, who had dropped a little heavily into the softest chair near Miss Long, turned his Chopinesque profile against a purple cushion to shoot a rather satirical glance at the cleaner-built youth in the worn grey suit.

"Now, how like a man! He doesn't admire Taffy particularly, but he's piqued to see her admire another type," Leslie summed this up quickly to herself. "Not really a bad sort; he behaved well about the invasion of these rooms. But he's like all these well-off young men who potter about antique shops when they ought to be taking exercise—he's plenty of feminine little ways. Since they call spitefulness 'feminine'!"

There was a distinctly spiteful note in the young man's voice as he made his next remark to his cousin.

This remark surprised even Leslie for a moment.

And to Gwenna's heart it struck with a sudden, unreasonable shock of consternation.

For Mr. Swayne inquired blandly across the tea-table: "Well, Paul; how's your *fiancée?*"

CHAPTER VIII

LAUGHING ODDS

BEFORE he answered, Gwenna had time to think smartingly, " His *fiancée !* There ! I might have *known* he was engaged. I might have guessed it ! It's nothing to do with me. . . . Only . . . I believe *that's* what's going to get in the way of my flying with him. She won't let him. I mean he'll always be taking her up ! And I know who it is, too. It's sure to be the one called Muriel that I saw go up with him at Hendon with the red hair and the scarf. I sort of guessed when I heard they were going up together that she must be his *fiancée.*"

And all the while her eyes were, apparently, on the silver stand of the spirit-kettle, they watched the young Airman's face (which looked a little sheepish). She listened, tensely, for his reply. Quite shortly Paul Dampier, still munching cake, said, " Who ? Oh ! Going on as usual, thanks."

" Now I may tell you that *that's* merely a pose to conceal devotion," laughed his cousin, turning to Gwenna. " Just as if every moment were not grudged that he spends away from HER ! "

" Is it ? " said the young girl with a smile. There was a bad lump in her throat, but she spoke with her most carefully-fostered, " English " accent. " I—I suppose that's natural ! " she remarked.

Hugo, fondling his Chopin curl again, went on amusing himself with this chosen subject.

"But, as is so often the case with a young man's fancy," he announced, "nobody else sees anything in 'her'!"

The stricken Gwenna looked quickly at young Dampier, who was cutting the Titan wedges that men call "slices," of cake. How would *he* take it that it had been said of his adored one that no one saw anything in her?

He only gave a short laugh, a confident nod of his fair head and said, "They will, though."

"Infatuated youth!" commented Hugo Swayne, resignedly, leaning back. "And he tries to cover it up by seeming casual. '*Going on as usual*' is said just as a blind. It sounds so much more like a mere wife than a *fiancée*, don't you think?"

"Ah, but you are cynique, monsieur," protested the young Frenchman, looking mildly shocked. "For you it is not sacred, the love for a wife?"

"Oh, look here! Hadn't you better explain to them," broke in Paul Dampier boyishly, having finished a large mouthful of his cake, "that you're rotting? *Fiancée*, indeed. Haven't got such a thing in the world, of course."

At this Gwenna suddenly felt as if some crushing weight of disappointment had fallen from her. "It's because I shall be able to go flying with him after all," she thought.

Young Dampier, rising to take her cup, grumbled laughingly, "D'you suppose girls will look at a man nowadays who can't afford to spend the whole of his time gadding about after 'em, Hugo, as you can, or blowing what's my salary for an entire year on their engagement-rings——"

"My dear fellow, no girl in the world exacts as much of a man's time and money as that *grande passion* of yours does," retorted Hugo Swayne, not ill-naturedly. And turning to Leslie, he explained: "What I call Paul's *fiancée* is that eternal aeroplane he's supposed to be making."

"Ah!" said Gwenna, and then blushed violently; partly because she hadn't meant to speak, and partly because this had drawn the blue eyes of the Airman quickly upon herself.

"Yes, that incessant flying-machine of his," enlarged Mr. Swayne, lolling back in his chair and addressing the meeting. "She—I believe it's correct to call the thing 'she'?—is more of a nuisance even than any engaged girl I've ever met. She interferes with everything this man does. Ask him to come along to a dance or the Opera or to see some amusing people, and it's always 'Can't; I'm working on the cylinder or the spiral or the Fourth Dimension' or whatever it is he does think he's working on. Practically 'she' spends all the time he's away from her ringing him up, or getting him rung up, on the telephone. 'She' eats all his spare cash, too——"

"In steel instead of chocolate, I suppose?" smiled Leslie. "And must she be humoured? She seems to have every drawback of a young woman with 'a diamond half-hoop.' Is she jealous, as well?"

And then, while taking a cigarette from Hugo's case, the elder girl made, lightly, a suggestion that the listening Gwenna was fated to remember.

"What would happen," asked Leslie dryly, "if a real flesh-and-blood *fiancée* were to come along as a rival to the one of machinery?"

"Nothing would happen," Hugo assured her, holding out a lighted match. "That's why it would be rather

interesting to watch. The complication of the Aeroplane or the Lady. The struggle in the mind of the young Inventor, what? The Girl"—he tossed aside the match and glanced fleetingly at the grave cherub's-face under Gwenna's white-winged hat—"The Girl versus the Flying Machine. I'd lay fifteen to one on the Machine, Miss Long."

"Done," said Leslie, demurely but promptly. "In half-crowns."

"Yes! You'd back your sex, of course," Hugo took up gaily. The young Frenchman murmured: "But the Machine—the Machine is also of the sex of Mademoiselle."

Here, suddenly, the silently listening Gwenna gave a tiny shiver. She turned her head abruptly towards the open windows behind her with the strutting pigeons and the sailing clouds beyond. It had seemed to the fanciful Celt that there in that too dainty room now hazy with cigarette-smoke, in that careless company of two girls and three young men, she had felt the hint of another Presence. It was rather horrid and ghostly—all this talk of a Machine that was made more of than a Woman! A Machine who "clawed" the man that owned her, just like a jealous betrothed who will not let her lover out of her sight! And supposing that Conflict did come, on which Gwenna's chum and Mr. Dampier's cousin had laid their laughing bets? The struggle between the sweetheart of steel springs and the sweetheart of soft flesh and warm blood? For one clear instant Gwenna knew that this fight would, must come. It was coming——

Then she turned her head and forgot her presentiments; coming back to the light-hearted Present.

She watched Leslie, to whom the young Frenchman had been talking; he was now fixing dark earnest eyes upon "Mademoiselle Langue" as she, in the rather stilted phraseology with which our nation speaks its own language for the benefit of foreigners, expounded to him an English story.

There was a short pause.

Then the room rang to the laughter of the foreigner.

"Ha! Yes! I have understood him! It is very amusing, that! It is good!" he cried delightedly, with a flash of white teeth and dark eyes. "He say, 'There are parts of it that are excellent!' Aha! *Très spirituel,*" and he laughed again joyously over the story of the Curate's Egg, while Hugo murmured something about how stimulating it was to hear, for once, the Immemorial Anecdote fall upon Virgin Soil.

The young Airman moved nearer to Gwenna, who, still watching Leslie, gave a little start to hear that deep and gentle voice so close beside her as he spoke.

"Look here, we haven't settled up yet," he said, his voice gentle but carrying above the chatter of the others. "About that flying. Sunday this week I have got to be off somewhere. Now, are you free next Saturday?"

Gwenna, eager and tremulous, was just about to say, "Yes." But Hugo Swayne interrupted.

"I say, I hate to make mischief. But if you're talking about Saturday——? D'you remember, Paul? It was the only day I could take you down to Ascot to see Colonel Conyers."

"Oh, Lord, so it was," said the young Airman, turning an apologetic face to the girl. "I'm so sorry," he explained, "but this is a man I've simply got to get hold of if I can. It's the Air-craft Conyers —'Cuckoo' Conyers they call him. And he was a

friend of Hugo's father, and what I've been trying to see him about is working the War-office to take up my new Machine——"

"The *Fiancée* again, you notice," laughed his cousin, with an imperceptible aside to Leslie. "Score to the Aeroplane."

"Yes, I see," said Gwenna, nodding at the Airman. "Of course! I mean of course I don't mind!"

"Then shall we say Saturday week for you to come up with me instead?" suggested young Dampier.

And Gwenna agreed to the date, thinking, "If only nothing stops it again! If only there isn't something else, then, to do with his Machine! That Machine! I——" Here she paused.

After all, it would be too ridiculous to allow oneself even to think that one "*hated*" a machine!

CHAPTER IX

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY

EAGERLY as Gwenna longed to fly, she was not to do so even yet.

After that appointment made at Hugo Swayne's rooms she lived through a fortnight of dreaming, tingling anticipation. Then came another of those brief direct notes from "*hers, P. Dampier.*" The girl jumped for joy. It was not to be at Hendon this time, but at Brooklands. Was she not rapidly gaining experiences? First Hendon, then Brooklands; at this rate she would soon know all the flying-grounds —Shoreham, Eastchurch, Farnborough, all of them!

"I'll call for you," the note said, "in the car."

"'*The*' car is good," commented Leslie, arranging a mist-blue scarf over Gwenna's small hat just before she started off on this expedition. "*In the Army all things are in common, including money and tobacco,* but the Dampier boy isn't in the Army."

"Why shouldn't he?" took up Gwenna, ungrammatically and defiantly. She considered Mr. Swayne's motor was honoured by this other young man who condescended to drive it, to fetch and whirl away with him a girl who felt herself a nymph about to be swept up and up above the clouds to some modern version of Elysium.

So twelve o'clock that Saturday morning (Gwenna

having obtained special leave of absence from the office) found the young man and the girl speeding through Kensington and Hammersmith, on the Woking Road.

The sun was hot above them; the road white; the hedges so dusty that they seemed grey ribbons streaming past. Gwenna scarcely realized how they went. She sat there beside him, thrilled and breathless, hardly knowing to which delight to give herself up, that of the coming flight, that of the present swift drive in the fresh breeze, or that of the companionship of this Demigod of Modern Times, whose arm almost touched hers sometimes as he moved or turned, or put on the brake.

Except for an occasional remark to the car: "Come on, don't be funny, old lady, don't be funny," or "Now for the hills; watch her sit down and laugh at 'em!" he spoke little; Gwenna didn't particularly want him to speak. The girl was in a golden and moving dream, and scarcely knew where it carried her.

She came out of that dream, not with a shock, but gradually. Was the car slowing down? It stopped; stopped in a wide part of that dust-white road between the tall, dust-grey hedges, opposite to a creosoted telegraph-pole spiked with nails. Through a gap in the hedge Gwenna caught sight of a moon-daisied field, with a dark hedge and trees beyond. Not a house, not a cottage in sight. This couldn't be Brooklands?

"Hul-lo," the boy was muttering. "What's up now?"

"What is it?" she asked.

He did not reply. This was not rudeness, as she guessed, but intentness; he took it for granted that she would not understand the mechanical explanation.

Resignedly she said to herself, "Machinery gone wrong? Sometimes it really seems as if that were all machinery ever *did* do! Yet that's what he said he was interested in, more than anything!"

He was out of the car and had flung back the bonnet. Then he took off his coat and hung it up on one of the nails on that telegraph-pole. He pushed up his shirt-sleeves and bent over the tool-box on the step.

Sitting there on the hot leather, Gwenna watched him, she heard the chinking of wrenches and spanners. Then he returned to the bonnet again, fumbling, handling, burrowing, grunting at things. . . . Ten minutes elapsed. . . .

He then broke out emphatically: "Oh, *Lord!* I *have* done it *now!*"

"Done what?" asked the girl anxiously.

In tightening a nut with a spanner the spanner had slipped. He had broken the porcelain insulation of the plug controlling the current.

And now, good-humouredly smiling at his guest, he leaned on the door of the car with his brown forearms crossed and said, "Short circuited. Yes. I'm afraid that's killed it."

"Killed what?" asked little Gwenna, in affright.

"Our flying for to-day," he said.

He went on to speak about "spare parts," and how it would be necessary to send someone back to fetch—something—Gwenna didn't care what it was. Her heart sank in dismay. No flying? Must they go back after all, now?

"Can't we get on?" she sighed.

He shook his shining head.

"We can make a picnic of it, anyhow," he said more encouragingly. "Shall you be all right here if I run back to that inn we passed just now with the bit of green

outside? I shan't be ten minutes. Send someone off on a bicycle, and bring some grub back here."

He jerked on his coat and was off.

Little Gwenna, sitting there waiting in the useless car —her small, disconsolate face framed in the gauze scarf with which she'd meant to bind her curls for the flying —was passed by half a dozen other motors on the road to Brooklands. It did not strike her, dreamily downcast as she was, that surely what the messenger from the inn was being dispatched to fetch might have been borrowed from one of these other motorists? Some of them, surely, would be men who knew young Paul Dampier quite well? Any of them might have come to the rescue?

This, as a matter of fact, had struck Paul Dampier at once. But he didn't want to go on to Brooklands! Brooklands? Beastly hot day; crowds of people; go up in an affair like an old Vanguard?

What he wanted, after a hard day's work yesterday on his own (so different) Machine, was a day's peace and quiet and to think things a bit over about her (the Machine) lying on his back somewhere shady, with a pipe. Actually, he would rather have been alone. But this little girl, Miss Williams. . . . She was all right. Not only pretty . . . but such a quiet, sensible sort of little thing. He'd take her up another time, since she was keen. He certainly would take her up. Not to-day. To-day they'd just picnic. *She* wouldn't want to be giggling and chattering about herself the whole time, and all that sort of thing, like some of them. She liked to listen.

She'd be interested to hear what he'd been doing lately, about the Machine. For a girl, she was pretty bright, and even if she didn't grasp things at once, she

evidently liked hearing about the Machine; besides which, it often cleared one's own ideas to one's self, to have to set 'em out and explain about the machinery very simply, to someone who was keen, but who hadn't a notion. They'd have a nice, peaceful time, this afternoon; somewhere cool, instead of Brooklands. And a nice long talk—*all* about the Machine.

He returned to the girl waiting in the car. Gwenna, cheering up at the sight of him, saw that his pockets were bulging with bottles, and that he carried a square, straw basket.

"There. I might have taken Hugo's luncheon-basket and filled that while I was about it; only I forgot there was one," he said, standing on the road and screwing up his eyes a little in the midday sun as he faced the car. "It's nicer eating out of doors, when you get a chance. Beastly dusty on the road here, though, and things going by all the time and kicking up clouds of it all over you. We'll find a pitch in that field."

So she jumped down from her seat and the two left the glaring road and got through that gap in the hedge-row where maybush and blackberry trail and grass and campion alike were all thickly powdered and drooping with dust.

The boy and girl skirted another hedge that ran at right angles to the road. Half-way up that field a big elm tree spread a patch of shade at its base like a dark-green rug for them to sit on. Paul Dampier put his coat down also. They sat, with moon-daisies and branching buttercups, and cow-parsley all sweet and clean about them.

Here the country-bred girl, forgetting her disappointment, gave a quick little sigh of content. She glanced about her at the known faces of flower-friends in the

grass ; a diaper of colours. Each year she had loved the time when white daisies and red sorrel and yellow rattle flaunted together over the heads of the lower-growing clovers and speedwells and potentillas. This year it seemed lovelier than ever. She put out her hand and pulled up a lance of jointed grass, nibbling the soft, pale-green end of it.

"Here, are you as hungry as all that?" laughed young Dampier at her side. "We'll feed."

He let Gwenna spread out upon the clean dinner-napkin in which they were wrapped the provisions that he had brought from the inn.

"All I could get. Bread-and-cheese. Couple of hunks of cold beef. Butter—salt," he said, giving her the things as he named them. "Plates I said we wouldn't worry about ; chuck the crumbs to the birds. Here's what I got to drink ; cider. D'you like it?"

"Love it," said Gwenna, who had never happened to taste it. But she knew that she would love it.

"Good. Oh! *Now* I've forgotten the glass, though," exclaimed young Dampier, sitting up on his knees on the shaded patch of grass beside her. "We shall both have to use the lower half of my flask. Sorry —hope you don't mind."

Gwenna, taking her first taste of cider in bird-like sips from that oblong silver thing, remembered the old saying, "Drink from my cup and you will think my thoughts." Then he put down upon the dinner napkin the half-loaf and the lump of cheese that he had been munching. He took the half of the flask, simply, out of the girl's hand, poured out more cider, and drank in turn.

"That's better," he said, smiling. She smiled back at him.

She had ceased to feel any shyness of this fair-haired aviator who rested there beside her in this oasis of shade

from the elm, while beyond them stretched the wide, dazzlingly bright desert of the flowering meadow, bounded by its hedges. He cut off the crusty part of the loaf for her (since she said she liked it). He sliced for her the damp and pinkish beef, since she would not confide to him her deep and feminine loathing of this fare. The woman is not yet born who can look upon cold meat as a food. And they drank in turn from his silver flask. This was their third meal together; yet Gwenna felt that she had been grown-up and conscious of delight in the world about her only since they had met.

Ease and gaiety rose between them in a haze like that which vibrated over the warm hay-field where they feasted.

"I say, I shall have to give a lunch at the Carlton to everybody I know," he laughed, half to himself, presently, "if I do get Colonel Conyers to make 'em take up the P.D.Q." Then, turning more directly to her. "Sorry—you don't know that joke. It's my Aeroplane, you know."

"Oh, yes, the one Mr. Swayne calls your *Fiancée!*" took up Gwenna quickly. Then she wished she hadn't said that. She reddened. She turned her supple little body to toss crumbs to a yellow-hammer that was eyeing them from a branch in the hedge behind her. And then she asked. "Why 'the P.D.Q.'?"

"Because she will be the Paul Dampier One, I hope," explained the young inventor, "and I always think of her as that other because it means 'Pretty Dam—Dashed Quick.'"

"Oh, is that it?" said Gwenna.

She echoed crossly to herself, "'*I always think of her*' indeed! It sounds like——"

And she finished her thought with the hardest-

working word in her native tongue; the Welsh for sweetheart.

"It does sound just as if he were talking about his *cariad*."

Absently she brushed more crumbs off her side of the dinner-napkin.

For one-half only of Gwenna now seemed to note that they were eating crusty loaf and drinking cider out of doors between a lupin-blue sky and a flowerful meadow; the other was conscious of nothing but her companion; of the clear friendliness of his eyes, those eyes of Icarus! Of his deep and gentle voice saying, "Mind if I smoke? You don't, I know," of those brown hard-looking fore-arms from which he had not troubled to pull down the sleeves, of his nearness.

Suddenly he came nearer still.

He had not stopped talking of his aeroplane, but she hardly remembered that she had asked him the meaning of one of the expressions that he had used.

He was repeating it.

"'Camber?' . . . Well, it's a curve. A curve like——" He glanced about for an example of the soft, end-wise curve on the great wings of an aeroplane; his eyes passing quickly from the green hedge to the ground, to the things on the picnic cloth, to Gwenna Williams's small hand as it rested in the grass.

She wondered, thrilled, if the young Airman were actually going to take hold of her hand?

He did take her hand, as simply as he had taken the silver cup from it. He bent it over so that her wrist made a gentle curve. He passed his own large fingers across it.

"Yes; there—that's the curve," he said. "Almost exactly."

It might have been a caress.

But, done as he did it, the light movement was nothing of the kind. Instinct told the girl that. It wasn't her small and soft and pink-palmed hand that he was thinking of holding. She looked at him as he said, "That's the curve," and she caught a gleam of quickened interest in his eyes. But in one mortified flash she knew that this had nothing to do with her. She guessed that at this moment he'd forgotten that there was a girl sitting there beside him at all.

And she knew why.

Angrily she said to herself, "He's thinking of nothing but that old machine of his! And I do—yes, I do, *do* hate her!"

Then she sat for a moment still as the elm-trunk against which she'd been leaning.

She had been struck thus motionless by a thought.

Something had been brought home to her by that sharp and sudden twinge of—Jealousy!

Yes! She knew now! What she felt, and must have been feeling for days past, was what they meant by falling in love.

"That's what I've done!" she thought rapidly; half in consternation, half in delight. "It's beginning to happen what Mr. Swayne was talking about at that tea: the Girl or the Flying Machine!"

She glanced towards the gap in the hedge as if to look at the car that had brought them, motionless by the road-side; she turned her face away from the Airman, who sat lighting a pipe with the shadows of the elm-branches dappling his fair head and shirt-sleeved shoulders.

She was blushing warmly at her own thoughts.

"It's only the flying-machine he cares about! He does like me, too; in a way. . . . If only he'd forget that other for a minute! But if he won't,"

thought Gwenna, happening upon an ancient piece of feminine philosophy, " I'd rather have him talking about *her* than not talking to me at all ! ".

She spoke aloud, sedately but interestedly.

" Oh, is *that* a camber ? " That light touch of his seemed still upon her wrist, though he had withdrawn it carelessly at once. She paused, then said, " And what was that other thing, Mr. Dampier ? Something about an angle ? "

" A dihedral angle ? " he said, drawing at that pipe. " Oh, that's the angle you see from the front of the thing. It's—look, it's like that."

This time it was not her hand he took as an illustration. He pointed, pipe in hand, to where, above the opposite hedge, a crow was sailing slowly, a vandyke of black across the cloudless blue.

" See that bird ? It's that very slight V he makes ; *now.*"

" And this machine of yours ? " persisted the girl, with a little twitch of her mouth for the rival whom he, it seemed, always thought of as " the P.D.Q." and whom Gwenna must always think of as " the *Fiancée.*" She wondered where it lived, the creature that meant all to him. She said, " Where—where d'you *make* that machine ? "

" Oh, I'm afraid it isn't a machine yet, you see. It's only a model of one, so far. You know, like a model yacht," he explained. " That's the worst of it. You see, you can make a model do anything. It's when you get the thing life-size that the trouble begins. Model doesn't give a really fair idea of what you've got to get. The difficulties—it's never the real thing."

Gwenna thought, " It must be like making love to the person you aren't really in love with ! " But what she said, with her hand stripping a spike of flowering

grass, was, " I suppose it's like practising scales and all that on a mute piano ? "

" Never tried," he said. Then : " *The model's* at my own place, my rooms in "——here he broke off with a laugh. He looked straight into her face and said, still laughing, and in a more personal tone :

" Not in Victoria Street. I say, you spotted that *that* place wasn't mine, didn't you ? "

" Leslie ' spotted ' and said so, afterwards," admitted Gwenna demurely, picking and sniffing at a piece of pink clover before she fastened it into her white blouse. " I did think at the time that it wasn't—wasn't the sort of place where you'd find a man living who *did* things, like."

" Rather rough on old Hugo."

" Well, but *does* he do things ? "

" He doesn't have to. He'd be all right if he did. Sweat some of that beef off him, give him something to think about," averred his cousin, carelessly knocking out his pipe against the heel of his shoe. " But, you know, my place is in Camden Town ; most inferior. Three rooms over a paper shop ; two small cubby-holes where I sleep, and eat, and a rather bigger one where I keep the ' P.D.Q.' stuff. I couldn't have you there that Sunday."

" Why not ? " Gwenna asked sharply, and jealous again. It was almost as if the *Fiancée* had said to him, " *No, not here !* "

" Because," he said with a chuckle, " because at the last moment, when I'd got the tea ready and everything "—he tossed his fair head back—" a fall of soot down the chimney ! Everything in the most ghastly mess ! Pitch black wherever you put a finger. I simply couldn't—it was four o'clock then ; I expect you both thought it rotten of me. Still," he concluded,

rather ruefully, " I couldn't give you the sort of polite tea Hugo can, anyhow."

" I don't want polite teas ! " Gwenna protested, looking round at the field where she had feasted as if in Elysium. " You don't suppose I care for things all grand like that, do you ? "

He responded, " Would you care to see my Camden Town place, then, and the model ? You and Miss Long. It's quite near you, you know."

" Yes, I should," said Gwenna quietly, stripping her grass.

How could he, she wondered, ask if she " cared " for these things that opened out new worlds to her ? If he only knew, just to be with him was part of that new, soaring freedom which to her was summed up in the idea of flying ! This, she felt, *was* flying. She didn't care, after all, if there were no other flying that afternoon. Care ? *She* wouldn't mind sitting there until the sun slipped slowly downwards towards the western hedge and the moon-daisies closed in the tall grass, and clouds of other tiny flying creatures poised and hovered above them. *She* wasn't sorry that the mechanic did not return in haste to minister to that broken-down car. When she did remember about it, it was almost to hope that he would not be back ! Not just yet ! Not to put an end to this golden afternoon of talk that, trivial as it was, seemed to her to be the endowment of a new faculty, and of comradeship that was as beguiling and satisfying as that of her bosom-chum, Leslie. Only newer, only more complete. So it seemed to Gwenna, as the shadows moved further up the grass where she sat with her new boy-friend.

For it is a commonplace that in all comradeship between man and woman passionate love claims a share.

But also in all passionate love there is more comradeship than the unimaginative choose to admit; there is a happy inner meaning to the cottage phrase, "To keep company with."

What he thought about it she did not know. Except that he surely must like talking to her? He could not go on like this out of politeness.

Ah, besides—! Besides, she knew, without reasoning about it, that, even with that absorbing interest of the aeroplane in the background, he did like her. Just as Leslie, her other friend, who also knew so much more than she did, had liked her at once.

"Only," decided Gwenna, in the uttermost depths of her shy and daring heart, "only he's *got* to like me, some day, better than Leslie ever could. He must. Yes; he *must!*"

And she thought it so ardently that she almost expected him, catching her thought, to answer it in words. She looked—no, he had caught nothing. But, meeting his eyes again, her own read a message that her fluttered mind had been told before this, but would scarcely let her believe. He thought she was pretty to look at? She had taken off her hat now, as she liked to do in the open air, and the light breeze tossed her short locks about.

"I *believe* he thinks," Gwenna told herself, "that my hair's nice."

As a matter of fact she was right. If she could have read her companion's thoughts at the moment she would have known of a quite foolish but recurrent wish on his part. A wish that he might just run his fingers through all those brown and thickly-twisting curls, to find out if they felt as silky as they looked.

A lark was carolling over her head, soaring, poising, poising, soaring, and singing all the while. . . .

" That's what we can't do, even yet ; *hover*," he said. And again he went on talking to the Little Thing (in his mind this babyish-faced but quite quick-witted girl was now always to be " the Little Thing ") about the chance of getting Colonel Conyers to take up that invention of his.

" I'm to go to spend the week-end at Ascot with him and have another talk about it," he said. " I know he's dead keen. *He* knows that it's aeroplanes that are going to make all the difference ; simply knock out, under some conditions, any other form of scouting. In modern warfare, you know—it's bound to come, some time—anybody with any sense knows that——"

" Yes, of course," agreed Gwenna, watching him as he stretched himself lazily out, chest downwards, elbows in, on the grass, chin propped in his hands, talking (all about the Machine).

" If he gave me a chance to build Her—make trial flights in the P.D.Q. ! If he'd only back me——"

" Oh, he will, surely ! " said Gwenna, her whole small face brightening or sobering in response to every modulation of his voice.

It was jolly, he thought, to find a girl who wasn't in the least bored by " Shop." She *was* a very jolly Little Thing. So sensible. No nonsense about her, thought the boy.

And she, when at last they rose and left the place, threw a last look back at that patch of sky above the hedge, where the black crow had made a dihedral angle, at that brooding elm, at that hay field, golden in the level rays, at that patch of dusty road where the car had pulled up, at that black telegraph-pole where he had

hung up his coat. That picture was graven, as by a tool, into the very heart of the girl.

At the end of an expedition that a young woman of more experience and less imagination would have pronounced "tame enough," Gwenna, bright-eyed and rosy from her day in the sunshine, could hardly believe that a whole lifetime had not elapsed since last she'd seen the everyday, the humdrum and incredibly dull Club where she lived.

She burst into her chum's bedroom as Leslie was going to bed.

"Taffy—back at last?" smiled Leslie, between the curtains of black hair on either side of her nightgown. "How's flying?—*What?*" she exclaimed, "you didn't go up at all? Broke down on the way to Brooklands? I say! How rotten for you, my poor lamb. Had anything to eat?"

"I think so—I mean, rather! He gave me a *lovely* lunch on the road while we were waiting for the man to mend the car—and then we'd tea at a cottage while he was doing it—and then there wasn't time to do anything but come back to town," explained Gwenna breathlessly, untying her scarf; "and then we'd sort of dinner at the inn before we started back; they brought out a table and things into the garden under the trees."

"What did you have for dinner?"

"I don't know. Oh, there were gooseberries," said Gwenna vaguely, "and a lamp. And the moths all came. Oh, Leslie! It's *been* so splendid!" She caught her breath. "I mean, it was *dreat*ful about no flying, but——"

"Glad the afternoon wasn't entirely a washout," said Miss Long, in an even voice, as she plaited her hair.

" By the way, did the Dampier boy give you back that locket of yours ? "

" I forgot all about it," said Gwenna, picking up the head of pink clover that had fallen out of her blouse. " I'll ask him next time. He's going to take me up soon, you know, again."

Just as an alarum is " set " to sound at some given hour, so the whole of the girl's innocent being was set, to wait and wait for that " next time " of meeting him—whenever it should be.

CHAPTER X

LESLIE, ON "THE ROOTS OF THE ROSE"

LESLIE LONG was lounging in a rickety deck-chair under the acacia tree that overshadowed the small lawn behind the Ladies' Residential Club. Miss Long looked nonchalantly untidy and her hair was coming down again. But she had an eye to an occasion on which she meant to shine. She was carefully darning a pair of silk stockings, stockings she was to wear with her all-mauve Nijinski rig at a costume dance in a week's time. She was looking forward to that dance.

It was a late Saturday afternoon, a fortnight after that Saturday that Gwenna Williams had spent in the country with the Dampier boy. Most of the girls in the Club were out somewhere now. Only one of the students from the College of Music was practising Liszt's "Liebestraum." Presently however, a sunshine-yellow jersey coat appeared on the steps at the back entrance of the Club. Gwenna Williams was looking out. She saw her chum in the garden and ran down to her; dropping upon the lawn at her feet, and nestling her curly head down upon the lengthy knee that supported the darning-basket.

Gwenna's small face looked petulant, miserable. She felt it. Leslie, to whom, of course, the other girl was as an open book, asked no question. She

left that to Gwenna, who had never, so far, made any spoken admission of what had happened—or not happened—since the evening when they had dressed together to go to that dinner-party at the 'Smiths'. It was Gwenna who asked the first question.

With a stormy and troubled sigh, she broke out, à propos of nothing: " How is one to make him? I mean how is one ever to get a young man to like one if he hardly ever sees one? "

Leslie looked down at her over the second mauve stocking that she was drawing over a yellow wooden darning mushroom.

" Tut," said Leslie, with her usual mock unction. " What is all this about 'getting' a young man to like one? What an expression, my love. And, worse; what a *sentiment!* Surely you know that men (nice men) think very lightly of a girl who does not have to be *wooed.* With deference, Taffy. With *reverence.* With hovering uncertainty and suspense and—er—the rest of that bag of tricks."

The soft, persistent notes of the " Liebestraum " coming through the open Club windows filled a short pause. Leslie threaded her needle with mauve silk, then took up her mushroom—and her theme—once more.

" Men care little for the girl who drops like a ripe plum (unripe fruit being obviously so much sweeter) into their mouths. (Query, why go about with their mouths open?) Not so. The girl who pleases is the girl who is hard to please."

A small discouraged sigh from Gwenna, as she sat there with her yellow jersey coat spread round her like a great dandelion in the grass.

" Oh, but supposing she *isn't* hard to please? " she faltered. " Supposing somebody pleased her awfully?

If he'd let her, I mean—oh, I daresay you think I'm dreadful ? "

" You outrage my most sacred whats-their-names —convictions, Taffy," declared Leslie, solemnly running her needle in and out of the stretched silk. " How many times must you be told that the girl a man prizes is she who knows how to set the very highest Value upon herself ? The sweetly reserved Girl who keeps Him Guessing. The ter-*ruly* maidenly type who puts a Barrier about herself, and, as it were, says, ' Mind the barbed wire. Thus far—unless it's going to be made worth my while, for good.' Haggling little Hebrew ! " concluded Miss Long.

For the girl at whom everybody is shocked has standards of her own. Yes ! There are things at which she, even she, is shocked in turn.

Leslie, speaking of that other, belauded type, quoted :

" ' *Oh, the glory of the winning when she's won !* '

(per-haps !)."

And in her voice there was honest disgust.

" No, but Leslie ! *Stop* laughing about it all ! And tell me, really, now—" appealed the younger girl, leaning an arm upon her friend's knee and looking up with eyes imploring guidance. " *You've* known lots of men. *You've* had them—well, admiring you and telling you so ? "

" Thank you, yes," said Leslie, demurely darning. " You mightn't think it, to look at me in this blouse, but I have been—er—stood plenty of emotional drinks of that kind."

" Then you know. You tell me—" pleaded Gwenna, pathetically earnest. " Is it true that men don't like you if they think you like them very much ? "

Leslie's impish face peeped at her over the silk

stocking held up over the mushroom. And Leslie's mouth was one crooked scarlet curve of derision.

But it straightened into gravity again as she said, "I don't know, Taffy. Honest injun! One woman can't lay down rules for another woman. She's got to reckon with her own type—just pick up that hairpin, will you—and his. I can only tell you that what is one man's meat is—another man's won't meet."

Gwenna, at her knee, sighed stormily again.

Leslie, rearranging herself cautiously in the insecure deck-chair, put a finger through one of Gwenna's curls, and said very gently, "Doesn't the Dampier boy come to meet it, then?"

Gwenna, carnation red, cried, "Oh *no!* Of *course* not. I wasn't *thinking* of him."

In the same breath she added shamefacedly, "How did you know, Leslie? You are clever!" And then, in a soft burst of confidence, "Oh, I *have* been so worrying! All these days and days, Leslie! And to-day I felt I simply *had* to tell you about it—or *burst!* I haven't really been able to think of anything but him. And he—he *hates* me, I know."

She used that word to console herself. Hate is so infinitely less discouraging than polite indifference!

Leslie glanced very kindly at the flushed face, at the compact yet lissom little body sitting up on its heels on the Club lawn. She asked, "Doesn't the creature *look* at you? The other day when he took you out and broke down the motor? Didn't he then?"

"Yes, he did," admitted Gwenna, "a little."

"That's a start, then. So 'Cheer up, Taff, don't let your spirits go down,'" hummed Leslie. "Ask your Fräulein at the works if she knows an excellent slang German phrase for falling in love. 'Der hat sich aber man ordentlich verguckt?' 'He's been

and looked himself well into it'—I am glad the Dampier boy did look. It *is* engendered in the eyes, as poor old Bernard Shaw used to say. It will be all right."

"Will it, d'you think? Will it?"

Gwenna, kneeling beside the dishevelled, graceful figure with its long limbs stretched out far beyond the deck-chair, gazed up as if into the face of an oracle.

"What do I *do*," she persisted innocently, "to make him look—to make him like me?"

"You don't 'do.' You 'be,' and pretty hard too. You, my child, sit tight. It's what they call the Passive Rôle of Woman," explained Leslie, with a twinkle. "Like *this*." And she drew out of her darning-basket a slender horseshoe-shaped implement such as workwomen use to pick up a dropped needle, painted scarlet to within half an inch of its end. She held it motionless a little away from her darning. There was a flash in the sunlight and a sharp little "click" as the needle flew up and clung to the magnet.

"D'you see, Turtle-dove?"

"Yes; but *that* isn't what you seemed to be talking about just now," objected Gwenna. "You seemed to think that a girl *needn't mind* 'doing' something about it. Letting a person see that she liked him."

"That isn't 'doing.' A girl can get in such a lot of useful execution—excuse my calling spade work spade work—all the time she is going on being as passive as—as that magnet," pronounced the mentor. "Of course you've got to take care to look as nice as you know how to all the time.

"And here you score, Miss Williams. Allow a friend to say that you're not only as pretty as they make 'em, but you know how to take care that you're as pretty *as they're made!*"

The younger girl, puzzled, asked the difference.

" I mean that you've cultivated the garden, and haven't got to start digging up the weeds and sweeping the lawn five minutes before you expect the garden-party," explained Leslie, in the analogies that she loved. " Some girls don't seem to think of ' making the most of themselves ' until the man comes along that they want to make much of *them*. Then it's so often a scramble. You've had the instinct. You haven't got your appearance into any of the little ways that put a man off without his knowing quite what he's been put off *by*. One excellent thing about you——"

" Yes ? " said Gwenna, rapt, expectant.

The particular unsolicited testimonial that followed was unexpected enough.

" For one thing, Taffy, you're always—*washed !* "

" Why, of course. But, Leslie—surely—so's *everybody !* "

" *Are* they ? " ejaculated Miss Long darkly. " They think they are. They simply haven't grasped how much soap and water and loofah go to that, in big towns. Half the girls aren't what *I* call tubbed. How many of them, with bathrooms a yard from their bedrooms, bother to have a scrub at night as well as in the mornings ? It's at night they're grimy, Taff. It's at night they leave it on, powder and all, to work into themselves until that ' unfresh ' look gets chronic. My dear, I tell you that the two-bath-a-day rule would give us much less of the Lonely-and-Neglected-Women Problem. There ! "

Gwenna Williams, twisting between finger and thumb the stalk of a daisy she had picked off the lawn, murmured something about it's being funny, love having anything to do with how often a girl *washed !*

"Of course you think Leslie is revoltingly unpoetic to suggest it. But it's sound enough," declared the elder girl. "Flowers don't look as if 'anything to do with' earth had ever touched them, do they? But aren't their roots bedded deep down in it right enough? All these hints I give you about Health and Body-culture, these are the Roots of the Rose. Some of them, anyhow. Especially *washing*. I tell you, Taff"—she spoke sepulchrally—"*half the 'nice' girls we know don't wash enough. That's* why they don't get half the attention they'd like. Men like what they call a 'healthy-looking' girl. As often as not it simply means the girl happens to be specially *clean*. Beauty's skin-deep; moral, look after your skin. Now, you do. No soap on your face, Taff?"

"No; just a 'clean' after washing, with Oatine and things like that."

"Right. Costs you about fourpence a week. It might cost four guineas, to judge from the economical spirit of some girls over that," said Leslie. "Then, to go on with this grossly material subject that is really the root of Poetry, do you shampoo your hair nice and often? It looks thick and soft and glossy and with the curls all big, as if you did."

"Oh, yes, I do. But then that's easy for me; it's short."

"Mine's long enough, but I do it religiously every fortnight. Pays me," said Miss Long candidly as she went on working. "Untidy it may be, but it does feel and smell all right. One of my medical students at the hospital where I trained for five minutes—the boy Monty, the Dean's son—*he* said once that the scent of my hair was like cherry-wood. 'Course I didn't confide in *him* that I watered it well with bay rum and rosemary every night. Better than

being like Miss Armitage, the suffragette-woman here, who's so nice-minded that she's ' above ' pampering the body. What's the consequence ? She, and half the girls here, go about smelling—to put it plainly —like cold grease and goloshes ! Can they wonder that men don't seem to think they'd be—be very nice to marry ? "

" Some suffragettes, and sort of brainy women," hesitated Gwenna, " are married."

" Yes ; and *have* you observed the usual type of their husbands ? " scoffed Leslie. " Eugh ! "

Gwenna, set upon her own subject, drew her back with innocent directness to the matter in hand.

" What else ought one to do ? Besides lots of washing, besides taking care of one's hair and skin ? "

" One's shape, of course," mused Leslie. " There you're all right. Thank goodness—*and me*—that you've left off those weird, those unearthly stays you came up to town in. My dear, they were like a hamper strapped round the middle of you and sending your shoulders up, squared, into your ears ! You've got a pretty slope there now, besides setting free all your ' lines.' I suppose elastic has pretty well solved the great corset question at last."

" Thirty shillings was a dreat-ful lot to give for just an elastic belt," murmured Gwenna, with her little hand at her supple waist. " Still, you said I must, even if I didn't have a new blouse over it for eighteen months." Again she looked up for guidance. " What else ? What's a good *thing*, Leslie ? About clothes and that ? "

" Oh, child, you know it all now, practically. Let's see—shoes "—she glanced at the tiny brown one half-tucked under Gwenna's knee. " *Boots and shoes* men seem to notice as much as any other part of your

get-up. Attractive shoes, even with an unfashionable skirt, will pull you through, when shabby shoes would ruin the look of the smartest rig. They see that, even when they've no idea what colour you've got on."

She went on to another hole in the stocking and continued: "As for colours, a man does seem to notice 'a girl in black,' or all-white, or pale blue. I read once that pale blue is 'the sex colour'—couldn't tell you, never worn it myself. Managed well enough without it, too!" mused Leslie. "Then 'a girl in pink' is very often a success in the evening. Men seem to have settled vaguely that pink is 'the pretty girl's colour.' So then they fondly imagine that anything that dares to wear it must be lovely. *You* needn't yet. Keep it for later. Pink—judicious pink—takes off ten years, Taffy!"

"I—I suppose I shall still care what I look like," murmured the young girl wistfully, "at thirty-two?

"Pearl of Wisdom Number Forty-eight: When in doubt, wear the coat-and-skirt (if it's decently cut) rather than the frock," decreed Leslie. "White silk shirts they seem to like, always. (I'm glad I weaned you of the pin-on tie, Taffy. It always looked like 'sixpence-three-farthings.' Whereas you buy a piece of narrow ribbon for 'six-three,' you *tie* it, you fasten it with a plain silver brooch to your shirt, and it looks *good*.)"

"I'll remember," murmured Gwenna devoutly, from the grass.

Leslie said, "One of the housemaids here—(never stoop to gossip with the servants, dearest. It *is* so unhelpful and demoralizing to both classes)—one of the housemaids once told me that *her* young man had told her that 'nothing in the wide world set a young

woman off like a nice, fresh, clean, simple shirt blouse, same as what she was wearing then ! ' Of course, *he* was a policeman. Not an aviator or a dean's son. But when it comes to a girl in the case, I expect they're ' *brothers under their skins*,' " said Leslie Long.

Husky with much talking, she cleared her throat.

" Pearl of Wisdom Number Forty-nine : Be awfully careful about your collar, the ends of your sleeves and the hem of your skirt. (Keeping a strong force on the Frontier ; that is always important.) Don't ever let your clothes be ' picturesque,' except for indoors. A man loathes walking along beside anything that flaps in the wind, or anything that looks like what he calls ' fancy dress.' Outside, don't wear anything that you can't skip easily on to the last bus in. Don't have ' bits ' of anything about you. Try to be as neat as the very dowdiest girl you know, *without the dowdiness*. Neatness, my belovèd sisters, is the—— (Here am I talking like this ; but why," she interrupted herself, laughing, " *why* aren't I neater myself when in mufti ? I mean, when there's nobody about ? ' *In time of Peace, prepare for War.*' It would be better. Might get my hair out of its *habit* of descending at the wrong moment.) And then, then, when all your good points are mobilized, you wait for the Enemy."

" The *enemy ?* " said little Gwenna, doubtfully.

" Yes. The Man. The opposing force, if you like. You can think and think and wish and wish about him then until the whole air about you goes shivery-quivery with it. ' Creating an atmosphere ' is what they call it, I believe. And get him well into the zone of *that*," advised Leslie. " For it's no use the magnet being a magnet if it doesn't allow itself to get within miles of a needle, is it ? Might as well be any old bit of scrap-iron. *Plenty of girls—nice* girls, I mean—not

like that deplorably vulgar Miss Long. What *she's* doing in a Club that's supposed to be for *ladies* I don't know. The *horrid* things she says! Bad! *Bad* form! And I'm sure if she says those here, she must have heaps of other worse things she *could* say, and probably *does*, to some people! Er—oh, where *was* I? Ah, yes!" rattled on Leslie, with her black head flung against the striped canvas back of the chair, her eyes on her surprisingly neat darning. "I was going to say—plenty of nice girls muff everything by putting too much distance that doesn't lend enchantment to the view between themselves and the men that aren't often sharp enough to deserve being called 'the needle.' Don't you make the mistake of those nice girls, Taffy."

"Well, do I *want* to? But how can I help it? How can I even try to 'be' anything, if he isn't there to know anything at all about it? I don't see him! I don't meet him!" mourned the Welsh girl in the soft accent that was very unmistakable to-day. "It's a whole fortnight, Leslie, since that lovely day in the fields. It seems years. He hasn't written or anything. I've waited and waited. . . . And sometimes I feel as if perhaps I *shouldn't* ever see him again. After all, I never did see him properly before we went to your sister's that night. Oh, isn't it awful to think what little *chances* make all the difference to who one sees or doesn't see? I can't know for certain that I shall *ever* see him again. Oh, Leslie!"

Leslie cut her last needleful of lilac silk and answered in the most reassuringly matter-of-fact tone:

"But of course you will. If you want to enough. For instance—should you like to see him at this dance?"

"Dance?" inquired Gwenna, dazed.

"Yes. This fancy-dress affair that I'm doing these

stockings for. (I won these in a bet from one of my Woolwich cadets.) This tamasha next week ? "

" But—*he* isn't going, is he ? And I'm not even asked."

" And can't these things ever be arranged ? " demanded her chum, laughing. " Can do, Taffy. Leslie will manage."

" Oh—but that's so *kind!* " murmured the younger girl, overcome.

" Do you expect me *not* to be ' kind ' ? To another girl, in love ? Nay, oh Taffy ! I leave that to the ' nicest ' of the girls who think it ' horrid ' to think about young men, even. Gem of Truth Number Eighty : It isn't the little girl who's *had* plenty to eat who's ready to snatch the bun out of the hand of the next little girl," said Leslie. She rolled the silk stockings into a ball, and rose in sections from that sagging chair. " Leslie will see you're done all right. All that remains to be discussed is the question of what you're to wear at the dance."

This question Leslie settled as the two girls went for an after-supper stroll. They went past the summer crowd patrolling the Spaniards Road, past the patch of common and the benches and the pond by the flagstaff that make that part of Hampstead so like a bit of the seaside. It was a golden evening. In the hazy distance a small, greyish, winged object rose above the plain which was Hendon, and moved to the left towards the blue taper of Harrow Church, then sank out of sight again.

" There's one," sighed Gwenna, her eyes on the glowing sky, where the biplane had been circling. " He's in it, perhaps."

" Little recking what plans are now being made for his welfare by me," observed Miss Long, as the two

girls descended the hill and found at last a birch thicket that was not held by Cockney lovers. She let herself down cross-legged into the bracken. The Welsh girl perched herself on a branch of the birch tree that was polished smooth as an old bench. Thus she sat among the stirring leaves, head on one side, listening, her babyish face looking down intent against the sky.

"Ah! That's *you!* '*A Cherub.*' That's what your fancy dress is to be," pronounced the elder girl. "Just your own little crop-curled head with nothing on it; and a ruff of cherub's wings up to your chin. Those little wings off your hat will do beautifully. Below the ruff, clouds. Appropriate background for cherubs. Your misty-white frock with no sash this time, and one of those soap-bubble coloured scarves of Liberty gauze draped over it to represent a rainbow. Little silver shoes. *Strictly* speaking, cherubs don't have those, of course. But if you can't become a Queen of Spain —if you can't be realistic, be pretty. Your own, nearly-always expression of dreamy innocence will come in nicely for the costume," added Leslie. "Quite in keeping."

"I'm sure I'm not that," protested the Welsh girl, piqued. "*I'm* not what they call 'innocent.'"

"No, I don't think you are. 'What they call innocent' in a girl is such a mixture. It means (a) no sense of humour at all; (b) the chilliest temperament you can shiver at, and (c) a complete absence of observation. But I believe *you* have '*beneath your little frostings the brilliance of your fires,*' Taffy. Yours is the real innocence."

"It isn't, indeed," protested the girl, who was young enough to wish to be everything but what she was. "Why, look at the way you say anything to me, Leslie!"

Leslie laughed, with a remoter glance. Then suddenly she dropped her black head and put a light caress on the corner of the sunshine-yellow jersey coat.

" Be as sweet always," she said, lightly too. " Look as sweet—at the dance ! "

CHAPTER XI

THE HEELS OF MERCURY

THIS injunction Gwenna carried out to the letter a week later. Never had she looked so pretty as when she smiled at her own reflection in her bedroom mirror above the cherub's ruff of wings on the evening of the dance.

It was given by some wealthy theatrical people whose "set" often intermingled with that to which Hugo Swayne belonged. And it was held in a couple of big marquees that had been set up on the lawn behind their house; a lawn of which the banks sloped down to the willows that fringed the river. There was a houseboat as buffet. There were Japanese lanterns and fairy-lights. Red carpet had been put down to save costumes from dewy grass or gravel.

For this dance was held at the height of that brief and grotesque period in the English history when dancing and costume—more particularly when the two were combined—became an affair of national moment. That was the time when tickets for an Artists' Ball were gambled with even as stocks and shares; when prizes for costume were given of which the value ran into hundreds of pounds. When columns of responsible newspapers were given up to descriptions of some "brilliant carnival." When Society, the Arts, Commerce, the Stage and the Middle Class joined hands to dance the maddest ring-o'-roses round some mulberry

bush rooted in Heaven knew what soil of slackness. That was the time when women who were mothers and able-bodied men were ready to fritter away the remnant of their youth on what could be no longer pleasure, since they chased it with such deadly ardour, discussing the lightest types of merrymaking as if thereupon hung the fate of an empire!

Even little cherub-headed Gwenna Williams found something disquieting about the sight of this throng as she scanned it with anxious eyes, for—no, HE hadn't come! He was late. Not here. Perhaps it was merely this that caused her to dislike the look of some of these other people? That buxomly-formed young woman of twenty-five tricked out in the costume of a child of three! That tall, fragile youth in black grave-clothes, mouthing falsetto patter! That pretty "lady" in spreading Georgian brocade and a white wig, from whose crimsoned lips there came presently a robust masculine shout! That Madame Potiphar in the—Good gracious!—it was another boy! No! Gwenna *didn't* like them, somehow. . . . Perhaps it was just because they were here and he, the only partner she wished for, had not arrived. Oh, *supposing* he were not coming, after all?

Under the canvas roof where garlands swung and an installation of electric light had been improvised, the crowd eddied and chattered and laughed from one end to the other of the marquee where the long tables were laid out. For it was a theatrical ball, late in beginning. Supper was to come first. Gwenna, sitting beside a Futurist Folly whom her friend Leslie had introduced vaguely as "one of my medical students," watched that supper-crowd (still he did not come), as they feasted, leaning across the tables to laugh and shriek to acquaintances. It was not the girls or the younger

men who seemed most boisterous, but those well over thirty. This surprised her. And even when they were most unrestrained "they seemed," as the Welsh girl put it, "to be *making* themselves do it, like." . . .

Then she saw, by an opening in the canvas of the marquee, the apparition of a steady man's figure, dead-white against the purple gloom outside. A figure erect and neatly-shouldered under the close linen jacket of a Continental waiter. Gwenna wondered where she had seen him before? In a photograph? Or perhaps attending to one of the tables at Appenrodt's, when she and Leslie had had tea after a matinée somewhere? She *had* seen that young waiter, whose appearance was in such arresting contrast to the bizarre costumes and painted faces of the noisy, laughing rabble about him. His face was restrained and grave as that of some very young Daniel at the feast of some modern Belshazzar.

Suddenly besides that still, watching apparition there came up another boyish figure—typically English, in ordinary evening dress, and tall, towering above the young German waiter of whom he was making some inquiry. For a second they stood so; the waiter glancing up, the newcomer, Paul Dampier, with his blonde head tilted a little back, his eyes raking the crowd.

"Ah! he's come," cried Gwenna aloud, but unheard in the universal clatter. Her heart leaped. . . .

But Paul Dampier, the airman, was swallowed up again almost directly in a forest of odd, luridly-coloured head-dresses. He had not seen her.

And she did not see him again until some time after supper was ended, and the throng was whirling and writhing in one-step and ragtime in the other marquee.

Gwenna had danced with an Apache, with a Primitive Man, with Mr. Hugo Swayne (in a mask and crazy-work domino as a Simultaneous Dynamism of Something), and she was standing waiting, one of a figure in a revived cotillon.

While the Viennese band swooped and tore through the waltz " Nights of Gladness " a sheet had been fetched and was held up at the end of the ballroom between a Morris-dancer and an incredibly handsome " Turco " (who presently revealed himself as Mr. Swayne's French engineer), as a screen before six of the girls. Six men were to be led up to it in turn; each to choose his partner by the feet that were just allowed to show below the sheet.

Soft laughter and twittering went on at the side where the half-dozen girls stood.

" I say," exclaimed a damsel dressed as an Austrian Peasant to her crinolined neighbour, " *now* we see why you were so anxious to explain why you were wearing scarlet——"

" Of course he'd know yours anywhere," retorted the next girl.

" Ssh ! Play fair ! " protested the next. " Mustn't be recognized by your voice ! "

" Oh, look at the Cherub girl's little shoes ! Aren't they sweet ? Just like silver minnows peeping out——"

Here Gwenna, standing sedately beside the scintillating, mauve-limbed Nijinski, Leslie, lifted her head in quick attention. She had recognized a voice on the other side of the sheet. A voice deep and gentle and carrying through the clatter of talk and the mad, syncopated music. It protested with a laugh, " But, look *here !* I can't dance all these weird——" It was the Airman—her Airman.

" Oh, he's just there. He's going to choose. If only

he'd choose me," thought Gwenna, breathlessly flutter ing where she stood. Then she remembered. "Oh, but he won't know me. He doesn't know I was to have silver shoes. If there was only *some*thing! Something to show him which I was, I believe he'd choose me. What could I do?"

Suddenly she thought what she could do. . . . Yes! Winged feet, of course, for a girl who longed to fly!

Hurriedly she put her hands up to the ruff made of those white wings. Hastily she plucked two of them out. How was she to fasten them to her feet, though? Alas, for the short curls that deprived her of woman's universal tool! She turned to her chum who was impatiently jigging in time to the music, with her long black hair swathed for once securely under that purple casque.

"Leslie, quick, a hairpin! Lend me two hairpins," she whispered and snatched them from her friend's hand. Then, holding on to Leslie's mauve silken shoulder to support herself, Gwenna raised first one small foot, and then the other, fastening to each between the stocking and the silver shoe, one of those tiny wings.

They were the feathered heels of Mercury, the flying-god, that the girl who loved a flying-man allowed to peep under the curtain behind which she stood.

Above the commotion of people laughing and talking all about her and the music she felt that he was close, only just behind that sheet. She could have put out a hand and, through that sheet, have touched his shoulder. . . . Mustn't, of course. . . . Must play fair. Would he note the message of the winged feet? Would he stop and choose her?

Or would he pass on?

CHAPTER XII

THE KISS WITHHELD

HE did not pass.

He stopped—Gwenna felt the touch of his finger on the silver tip of her shoe. All a-tremble with delight she moved aside, and stepped from behind the screen to face the partner who had chosen her.

"*Hullo!*" exclaimed Paul Dampier, with real surprise in his smile. "I didn't know it was *you!*"

Gwenna felt a little dashed, even as he slipped his arm about her and they began to waltz. She looked up into the blonde face that seemed burned so very brown against his dress-shirt, and she ventured, "You didn't know it was me? I thought that was why you chose me—I mean, I thought because I was somebody you knew——"

"Didn't know you were here. I never thought those were your feet!" he said in that adorably deep and gentle voice of his. Adding, as they turned with the turning throng, something that lifted her heart again, "I chose them because they were the prettiest, I thought."

It was simply stated, as a fact. But this, the first compliment he'd paid her, kept her silent with delight. Even as they waltzed, his arm about her rainbow scarf, the girl felt the strongest wish—the wish that the dance were at an end and she back in her bedroom at the Club, alone, so that she might think and think

again over what he had said. He'd thought she had the prettiest feet!

"D'you think you could manage to spare me some others?" he asked at the end of that waltz. "You know, you're about the only girl here that I know except Miss Long."

"Leslie would introduce you to anybody you liked" —suggested little Gwenna, feeling very good for having done so. And virtue brought its reward. For with a glance about him at that coloured noisy crowd that seemed a handful of confetti tossed by a whirlwind, he told her he didn't think he wanted to be introduced, much. He wasn't really keen on a lot of people he'd never seen. But if she and Miss Long would give him a few dances——?

The girl from the country thought it almost too good to be true that she need not share him with any of these dangerously fascinating London people here, except Leslie!

In a pause they went up to where Leslie was standing near the band. Close beside her the Morris-dancer was wrangling with Hugo Swayne in his crazy-work domino, who declared, "Miss Long promised *me* every other dance. A week ago, my dear man. Ten days ago——"

Yes; Leslie seemed to be engaged for every dance and every extra. She tossed a "*so* sorry, Mr. Dampier!" over her shoulder, following it with an imperceptible feminine grimace for Gwenna's benefit. With the first bars of the next waltz she was whirled away by a tall youth garbed, becomingly enough, as a Black Panther. The room was still clear. The Black Panther and the boyishly slim girl in mauve tunic and tights waltzed, for one recurrence of the tune, alone. . . .

Gwenna, looking after that shapely couple, knew

who *he* was; Monty Scott, the Dean's son who had been a medical student when Leslie was at the Hospital. He had followed her to the Slade to study sculpture, and already he had proposed to her twice.

The tall and supple youth held Leslie, now, by his black-taloned gloves on her strait hips. Leslie waltzed with hands clasped at the back of his neck. Then, with a backward fling of her head and body, she twisted herself out of his hold. She waltzed, holding the flat palms of her hands pressed lightly to the palms of his. The music altered; Leslie varying her step to suit it. She threw back her head again. Round and round her partner she revolved, undulating from nape to heels, not touching him, not holding him save by the attraction of her black eyes set upon his handsome eyes, and of her red lips of a flirt, from which (it was evident!) the boy could not take his gaze. Once more she shook her purple-casqued head; once more she let him catch her about the hips. Over the canvas floor they spun, Leslie and Monty, black-and-mauve, moving together with a voluptuous swing and zest that marked them as the best-matched dancers in the room. Well-matched, perhaps, for life, thought Leslie's chum. . . . But no; as they passed Gwenna saw that the black eyes and the red mouth were laughing cynically together; she caught, through the music, Leslie's clear "Don't *talk! don't* talk when you're dancing, my good boy. . . . Spoils everything. . . . You *can* waltz. . . . You know you've never anything to *say*, Mont!"

"I have. I say——"

Leslie waltzed on unheeding. Whatever he had to say she did not take it seriously. She laughed over his shoulder to little Gwenna, watching. . . .

Couple after couple had joined in now, following the

swift tall graceful black shape and the light-limbed mauve one as they circled by. A flutter of draperies and tinsel, a toss and jingle of stage accoutrements; the dancers were caught and sped by the music like a wreath of rainbow-bubbles on the rise and fall of a wave.

Gwenna, the Cherub-girl, was left standing for a wistful moment by the side of the tall Airman in evening dress.

He said, through the music, "Who's your partner for this?"

She had forgotten. It was the Futurist Folly again. He had to find another partner. Gwenna danced with her Airman again . . . and again. . . .

Scarcely realizing how it happened—indeed, how do these arrangements make themselves?—this boy and girl from a simpler world than that of this tinsel Bohemia spent almost the whole of the rest of that evening as they had spent that day in the country, as she would have asked to spend the rest of their lives together.

Some of the time they danced in the brilliant, heated marquee under the swinging garlands and the lamps. Then again they strolled out into the Riverside garden. Here it was cool and dewy and dim except where, from the tent-openings, there was flung upon the grass a broad path of light, across which flitted, moth-like, the figures of the dancers. Above the marquee the summer night was purple velvet, be-diamonded with stars. At the end of the lawn the river whispered to the willows and reflected, here the point of a star, there the red blot of a lantern caught in a tree.

Hugo Swayne went by in this bewildering stage, light-and-shade with a very naughty-looking lady who declared that her white frock was merely "'Milk,' out of 'The Blue Bird.'" In passing he announced

to his cousin that the whole scene was like a Conder fan that he had at his rooms. Groups of his friends were simply sitting about and *making* themselves into quite good Fragonards. Little Gwenna did not even try to remember what Fragonard was. None of these people in this place seemed real to her but herself and her partner. And the purple dusk and velvet shadows, the lights and colours, the throb and thrill of the music were just the setting for this " night of gladness " that was only a little more substantial than her other fancies.

More quickly it seemed to be passing ! Every now and again she exultantly reminded herself, " I am here, with him, out of all these people ! He is only speaking to me ! I have him to myself—I must feel that as hard as I can all the time now, for we shall be going home at the end of this Ball, and then I shall be alone again. . . . If *only* I could be with him for always ! How extraordinary, that just to be with one particular person out of all the world should be enough to make all this happiness ! "

With her crop-curled head close against his shoulder as they danced, she stole at her boyish partner the shy, defiantly possessive glance that a child gives sometimes to the favourite toy, the toy that focusses all his dreams. This was " the one particular person out of all the world " whose company answered every conscious and unconscious demand of the young girl's nature even as his waltz-step suited her own.

Yet she guessed that this special quiet rapture could not last. Even before the end of the dance the end of *this* must surely come ?

It must have been long hours after the waltz-cotillon that they strolled down to a sitting-out arbour that had been arranged at the end of the path nearest the

river. It was softly lighted by two big Chinese lanterns, primrose-coloured, ribbed like caterpillars, with a black base and a splash of patterned colour upon each; a rug had been thrown on the grass, and there were two big white-cane chairs, with house-boat cushions.

Here the two sat down, to munch sandwiches, drink hock-cup.

"I remembered to bring two glasses, this time," said Paul Dampier.

Gwenna smiled as she nodded. Her eyes were on those silver white-finned minnows of her feet, that he had called pretty.

He followed her glance as he took another sandwich. "Rather a good idea, wings to your shoes because you're supposed to be a cherub."

"Oh, but that's not what the wings were supposed to be for," she said quickly. "I only put those in at the waltz-cotillon so that——"

Here she stopped dead, wishing that the carpeted grass might open at those winged feet of hers and swallow her up!

How could she have given herself away like this? Let him *know* how she had wanted him to choose her! when he hadn't even known she was there; hadn't been thinking about her!

She flurried on: "S-so that they should look more like fancy-dress shoes instead of real ones!"

He turned his head, dark and clean-cut against the lambent swaying lantern. He said, out of the gloom that spared her whelming blush, "Oh, was that it! I thought," he added with a teasing note in his voice, "I thought you were going to say it was to remind me that I'd promised to take you flying, and that it's never come off yet!"

Gwenna, hesitating for a moment, sat back against the cushions of the wicker-chair. She looked away from him, and then ventured a retort—a tiny reproach.

"Well—it *hasn't* come off."

"No, you know—it's too bad, really. I have been most frightfully busy," he apologized. "But we'll fix it up before you go to-night, shall we? You must come." At this he was glad to see that the Little Thing looked really pleased.

She was awfully nice and sensible, he thought for the severalth time. Again the odd wish took him that had taken him in that field. Yes! He *would* like to touch those babyish-looking curls of hers with a finger. Or even to rumple them against his cheek. . . . Another most foolish and incomprehensible wish had occurred to him about this girl, even in her absence. A propos of nothing, one evening in his rooms he had remembered the look of that throat of hers; round and sturdy and white above her low collar. And he had thought he would rather like to put his own hands about it, and to pretend—quite gently, of course—to throttle the Little Thing. To-night she'd bundled it all up in that sort of feather boa. . . . Pity. . . . She was ever so much prettier without.

Fellow can't say that sort of thing to a girl, though, thought the simple Paul.

So he merely said, instead, "Let me stick that down for you somewhere," and he leant forward and took from her the plate that had held her cress-and-chicken sandwiches. Then he crossed his long legs and leant back again. It was jolly and restful here in the dim arbour with her; the sound of music and laughter came, much-softened, from the marquee. Nearer to them, on the water below the willows, there was a little splashing and twittering of the moor-

hen, roused by something, and the scarcely audible murmur of the Thames, speeding past House-boat Country to London . . . the workaday Embankment. . . . It was jolly to be so quiet. . . .

Then, into the happy silence that had fallen between them, there came a sound—the sound of the crunching of gravel. Gwenna looked up. Two figures sauntered past down the path; both tall and shapely and black against the paling, star-sprinkled sky above the frieze of sighing willows. Then Leslie's clear, careless voice drifted to their ears.

"Afraid not. . . . Anyhow, what on earth would be the good of caring '*a little*'? . . . I look upon you as such an infant—in arms——"

Here there was a bass mutter of, "Make it *your* arms, and I don't mind!"

Then Leslie's insouciant: "I *knew* you'd say that obvious thing. I always do know what you're going to do or say next . . . fatal, that. . . . A girl *can't* want to marry a man when——"

Apparently, then, the Dean's son was proposing again?

As the couple of free-limbed black shadows passed nearer, Paul Dampier kicked his heel against his chair. He moved in it to make it creak more noisily.

Good manners wasted!

For Leslie, as she afterwards told her chum, took for her motto upon such occasions, "*And if the others see, what matter they?*"

Her partner seemed oblivious that there were any "others" sitting in the shadows. The couple passed, leaving upon the night-breeze a trail of cigarette-smoke (Leslie's), and an indistinguishable growl, presumably from the Black Panther.

Leslie's voice floated back, "Not in the mood. Besides! You *had*, last time, 'to soften the edges,' as you call it."

More audibly her partner grumbled, "What's a kiss you've *had?* About as satisfying as last summer's strawberry-ice——"

A mere nothing—the incident.

Yet it brought (or hastened) a change into the atmosphere of that arbour where, under the giant glow-worms of lights swinging above them, two young people sat at ease together without speaking.

For Gwenna, envious, thought, "Leslie can make a man think of nothing but her, even when she's 'not in the mood!' I can't. Yet I believe I could, but for one thing. Even now I don't know that he isn't thinking about That Other——"

"That Other" was her rival, that machine of his that Gwenna had not mentioned all the evening. . . .

It had come, she knew, that duel between the Girl and the Aeroplane for the first place in the heart of a Flying Man. A duel as old as the world, between the thing a man greatly loves, and that which he loves more greatly still. She thought of Lovelace who "*loved Honour more.*" She thought of the cold Sea that robs the patient, warm-hearted women ashore, of the icy Pole whose magnetism drew men from their wives. The work that drew the thoughts of her Airman was that Invention that was known already as his *Fiancée*. . . .

"Leslie says it's not as bad as if it were another woman, but I see her as a woman," thought the silent, fanciful girl, "I see her as a sort of winged dragon with a figure-head—aeroplanes don't have figure-heads, but this one seems to me to have, just like some of

those vessels that come into the harbour at Aberdovey. Or like those pictures of harps that are half a woman. Smooth red hair she has, and a long neck stretched out, and a rather thin, pale, don't-care sort of face like that girl called Muriel. And—and eagle's talons for hands. That's how I see that *Fiancée* of his, with claws for hands that won't, *won't* ever let him go. . . ."

A puff of wind knocked one of the lanterns above their heads softly against the other; the willows rustled silkily outside. Gwenna sat motionless, holding her breath. Suddenly her reverie had broken off with an abrupt, unspoken—" but it's me he's thinking of *now*. . ."

Paul Dampier had been lightly amused by that passing of the other couple. That friend of hers, Miss Long, was more than a bit of a flirt, he considered. This Little Thing wasn't. Couldn't imagine *her* giving a kiss as some girls give a dance; or even to " soften " a refusal. . . . Her mouth, he found himself noticing, was full and curly and exactly the colour of the buds of those fox-gloves that grew all over the shop at her place in Wales. It was probably softer than those curls of hers that he would (also) like to touch.

Idiotic idea, though——

But an idea which is transmittible.

Gwenna, thrilled by this message which she had caught by a method older and less demonstrable than Marconi's, realized: " He heard *that*, just now; that boy wanting to kiss Leslie. . . . He's thinking, now, that he might kiss me."

The boy scarcely at arm's length from her thought a little confusedly, " I say, though. . . . Rotten thing to do. . . ."

The girl thought, " He would like to. *What* is he waiting about? We shall have to go directly——"

For the sky outside had been swiftly paling. Now

that pure pallor was changing to the glow of Abyssinian gold. Dawn! From the marquee came a louder blare of music; two long cornet notes and then a rollicking tune—The old "Post Horn" Galop—the last dance. Presently a distant noise of clapping and calls for "Extra"! There would be no time for extras, she'd heard. They would have to go after this. People were beginning to go. Already they had heard the noise of a car. His chair creaked as he moved a little sidewards.

He told himself, more emphatically, "Beastly rotten thing to do. This Little Thing would never speak to me again——"

And the girl sat there, without stirring, without glancing at him. Yet every curve of her little body, every eyelash, every soft breath she drew was calling him, was set upon "making" him. What could she do more to make herself, as Leslie called it, a magnet? Love and innocent longing filled her to the eyes, the tender fox-glove buds of lips that could have asked for nothing better. Even if this *were* the only time! Even if she never saw him again!

Wasn't he going to set the crown upon her wonderful dream of a summer night?

"No, look *here*," the boy remonstrated silently with something in himself; something that seemed to mock him. He lifted his fair head with a gleam of that pride that goes so often before a fall. "Dash it all——"

"He will!" the girl thought breathlessly. And with her thought she seemed to cast all of her heart into the spell. . . .

And then, quite suddenly, something happened whereby that spell was snapped. Even as she thought "*he will*," he rose from his chair.

He took a step to the entrance of their arbour, his shoulders blotting out the glowing light.

"Listen," he said.

And Gwenna, rising too, listened, breathlessly, angrily. He would *not*—she had been cheated. What was it that had—*interfered?* Presently she heard it, she heard what she would have taken for the noise of another of the departing motors.

Through the clatter from the last galop it was like, yet unlike, the noise of a starting car. But there was in it an *angrier* note than that.

It is angry for want of any help but its own. A motor-car has solid earth against which to drive; a steamship has dense water. But the Machine that caused this noise was beating her metal thews against invisible air.

It was an aeroplane.

"Look!" said Paul Dampier.

Far away over the still benighted land she rose, and into that glory of Abyssinian gold beyond the river. Gwenna, moving out on to the path, watched the flight. Before, she had wondered that these soaring things didn't come down. Now, she would have wondered if they had done so.

Steady as if running on rails, the aeroplane came on overhead; her sound as she came now loud, now soft, but always angry, harsh—harshness like that of a woman who lives to herself and her strivings, with no comradeship of Earth on which to lean. Against the sky that was her playground she showed as a slate-coloured dragonfly—a purple Empress of the Air soaring on and on into the growing dazzle of the day.

"Oh, it *is* beautiful, though," cried the girl on the path, looking up, and losing for that moment the angry

sense that had fallen upon her of pleasure past, of the end of the song. "It is wonderful."

"Pooh, that old horse-bus," laughed Paul Dampier above her shoulder, and mentioned the names of the machine, the flyer in her. He could pick them out of the note of her angry song.

"That will be nothing to my P.D.Q.," he declared exultantly as they walked on up the path towards the marquee. "You wait until I've got my aeroplane working! That'll be something new in aviation, you know. Nearest thing yet to the absolute identity of the Man with the Machine."

He yawned a little with natural sleepiness, but his interest was wide-awake. He could have gone on until breakfast-time explaining some fresh point about his invention, while the girl in those little silver-heeled shoes paced slowly up the path beside him. . . . . He was going on.

"Make all those other types, English or foreign, as clumsy as the old-fashioned bone-shake bicycle. Fact," he declared. "Now, take the Taube—Hullo——"

"*Bitte*," said a voice.

The German word came across a pile of plates deftly balanced upon a young man's forearm. That arm was clad in the sleeve of a trim white jacket, buttoned over a thick and compact little chest. The waiter's hair was a short, upright golden stubble, and another little stubble of gold sprouted upon his steady upper lip. He had come up, very softly, behind them.

He spoke again in excellent English.

"By your leave, sir."

Dampier made way for him, and he passed. Gwenna, with a little shiver, looked after him. The sight of the young waiter whom she had noticed at the beginning of the evening had given her an unreasonable

little chill. . . . Perhaps it was because his softly-moving, white figure against those willows had loomed so like a ghost. . . .

Dampier said, "Rotten job for a man, I always think, hanging about and picking up things for other people like that."

"Yes," said Gwenna, absently, sadly. It *was* the end now. Quite the end. They'd got to go home. Back to everyday life. The Club, the Works. Nothing to live for, except—Ah, yes! His promise that he *would* take her flying, soon. . . .

Above in the glowing sky the aeroplane was dwindling—to disappear. The waiter, turning a corner of the dark shrubbery, had also disappeared as they passed. From behind the shelter of the branches he was watching, watching. . . .

He was looking after Paul Dampier, the Airman—the inventor of the newest aeroplane.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FLYING DREAM

"*THOSE dreams come true that are dreamed on Midsummer night!*"

This saying Gwenna had read somewhere. But she had forgotten all about it until, on the night of June 24th, 1914, she dreamed the most vivid dream of all her twenty-two years.

Many people have that same dream—or versions of it—often in a lifetime. Scientists have written papers on the whys and hows of it. They tack a long name to it. But little Gwenna Williams had never heard of "*levitation.*" To herself she called it afterwards "*that flying dream.*"

It seemed to her that when it began she was still half-awake, lying in her narrow white bed with the blankets tossed on to the floor of her Club bedroom, for it was a sultry night and close, in spite of her window on to the garden being wide open and allowing what breeze there was to blow full upon the girl's face, stirring her curls on the pillow, the ruffle of her night-gown as she lay.

Suddenly a violent start ran over the whole of her body. And with that one jerk she seemed to have come out of herself. She realized, first, that she was no longer lying down, curled up in the kitten-like ball

which was her attitude for sleeping. She was upright as if she were standing.

But she was not standing. Her feet were not resting on anything. Looking down, she found, without very much surprise, that she was poised, as a lark is poised, in mid-air, at some immeasurable height. It was night, and the earth—a distant hassock of dim trees and fields—was far, far below her.

She found herself moving downwards through the air.

She was flying!

Gently, gently, she sped, full of a quiet happiness in her new power, which, after all, did not seem to be something new, but something restored to her.

"Dear me, I've flown before, I know I have," said Gwenna to herself as she swooped downwards in her dream, with the breeze cool on the soles of her little bare feet. "This is as lovely as swimming! It's lovelier, because one doesn't have to *do* anything. So silly to imagine that one has to have *wings* to fly!"

Now she was nearer to earth, she was hovering over a dark stream of water with reflections that circled and broke. And beside it she saw something that seemed like a huge lambent mushroom set in the dim fields below her. This was a lighted tent, and from it there floated up to her faintly the throb and thrill of dance-music, the two long-drawn-out notes of the "Post Horn" Galop, the noise of laughter and clapping. . . . She wondered whom she would see, if she were to alight. But the Force in her dream bore her up again, higher, and away. She found presently that she had left the dancing-tent far behind, and that what streamed below her was no longer a river with reflections, but a road, white with dust, and by the side of it a car was standing idle by the dusty hedge. On the other side of the hedge, as

she flew over, the grass was clean and full of flowers, and half-way up the field stood a brooding elm that cast a patch of shadow.

"Sunshine, now!" wondered Gwenna. "How quickly it's changed from night!"

She felt from head to foot her body light and buoyant as a drifting thistle-down as on she went through the air. Close beside her, against a bank of cloud, she noticed some black V-shaped thing that slanted and flapped slow wings, then planed downwards out of her sight. "That's that crow. A dihedral angle, they call it," said the dreaming girl. Her next downward glance, as she sped upwards now, without effort, above the earth, showed her a map of distant grey roofs and green trees, and something that looked like a giant soap-bubble looming out of the mist.

"St. Paul's! London!" thought Gwenna. "I wonder shall I be able to look down on our Westminster place."

Then, glancing about her, she saw that the scene had suddenly changed. She was no longer in the free air with clouds about her as she flew like a little white wind-blown feather with the earth small as a toy puzzle below. She was between walls, with her feet not further than her own height from the ground. Night again in a room. A long, narrowish room with an open window through which came the light of a street-lamp that flung a bright patch upon the carpet, the edge of a dressing-table, the end of a white bed. Upon the bed, from which the coverings had been flung down, there lay sleeping, curled up like a kitten, a figure in a white, ruffled night-gown, with a cherub's head thrown backwards against the pillow. Gwenna, looking down, thought, "Where have I seen *her?*"

In the next flash she had realized.

Herself! . . . Her own sleeping body that her dreaming soul had left for this brief flight. . . .

A start more violent than that with which her dream had begun shook the dreamer as she came to herself again.

She woke. With a pitiful little "Oh," sounding in her own ears, she sat up in bed and stared about her Club bedroom with its patches of light from the street-lamp outside. She was trembling from head to foot, her curls were wet with fright, and her first thought as she sprang out of bed and to the door of that ghostly room was "I must go to Leslie."

But Leslie's bedroom was a story higher. Gwenna paused in the corridor outside the nearest bedroom to her own. A thread of light showed below the door. It was a Miss Armitage's, and she was one of the Club members, who wrote pamphlets on the Suffrage, and like topics, far into the night. Gwenna, feeling already more normal and cheered by the sense of any human nearness, decided, "I won't go to her. She'll only want to read aloud to me. . . . She laughed at me because I said I adored 'The Forest Lovers,' but what books does *she* like? Only those *dreat*-ful long novels all about nothing, except the diseases of people in the Potteries. Or else it'll be one of her own tracts. . . . Somehow she does make everything she's interested in sound so *ugly*. All those intellectual ones here do! Whether it's Marriage or Not-getting-married, you really don't know which would be the most *dull*, from these suffragettes," reflected the young girl, pattering down the corridor again. "I'll go back to bed."

She went back, snuggling under the clothes. But she could not go to sleep again for some time. She lay curled up, thinking.

She had thought too often and too long of that dance

now three whole weeks behind her. She had recalled, too many times! every moment of it; every word and gesture of her partner's, going over and over his look, his laugh, the tone in which he'd said, "Give *me* this waltz, will you?" All that memory had had the sweetness smelt out of it like a child's posy. By this time it was worn thin as heirloom silver. She turned from it. . . . It was then she remembered that saying about the Midsummer Night's Dream. If that were true, then Gwenna might expect soon to fly in reality.

For after all her plans and hopes, she had not even yet been taken up by Paul Dampier in an aeroplane!

In that silent, unacknowledged conflict between the Girl and the Machine, so far scarcely a score could have been put down to the credit of the Girl. It was she who had always found herself put back, disappointed, frustrated. This had been by the merest accidents.

First of all, the Airman hadn't been able to ask her and Miss Long to his rooms in Camden Town to look at his model aeroplane. He had been kept hanging on, not knowing which Saturday-to-Monday Colonel Conyers ("the great Air-craft Conyers") was going to ask him down to stay at that house in Ascot, to have another talk over the subject of the new Machine. ("A score for the Machine," thought the girl; wakeful, tossing on her bed.)

She did not even know that the week after, on a glorious and cloudless Saturday, young Dampier, blankly unaware that there was any conflict going on in his world! had settled to ask "the Little Thing" to Hendon. On the Friday afternoon, however, his firm had sent him out of town, down to the factory near Aldershot. Here he had stayed until the following Tuesday, putting up at the house of a kindred soul employed at

that factory, and wallowing in "Shop." . . . Another win for the Machine!

The following Sunday the cup had been almost to Gwenna's lips. He had called for her. Not in the car, this time. They had taken the Tube to Golders Green; the motor-bus to Hendon Church; and then the path over the fields together. Ah, delight! For even walking over the dusty grass beside that swinging boy's figure in the grey tweed jacket was a joyous adventure. It had been another when he had presently stooped and said, "Shoelace come untied; might trip over that. I'll do it up," and had fastened her broad brown shoe-ribbon securely for her. Her shoes had been powdered white. He had taken his handkerchief out of his pocket and had flicked the dust off, saying, as he did so, in a tone of some interest, "I say, what tiny feet girls do have!"

("Pie for you, Taffy, of course," as Leslie had said later, when she'd heard of this. "Second time he'd noticed them.")

Gwenna, in a tone half pleased, half piqued, had told him, "*All* girls don't have them so small! And yet you don't seem to notice anything about people but their feet." She had walked on, delightedly conscious of his laugh, his amused, "Oh! don't I?" and his downward glance. . . . Wasn't this, she had thought, something of a score at last for the Girl!

But hadn't even that small score been wiped out on the flying-ground? There Gwenna had stood, waiting, gleeful and agitated; her mist-blue scarf aflutter in the brisk breeze, but not fluttering as wildly as her heart. . . .

And then had come frustration once again! Paul Dampier's deep and womanishly-soft tone saying, "I say, I'm afraid it's going to be a bit too blowy, after all.

Wind's rising all the time;" and that other giant voice from the megaphone announcing:

> "Ladies and gentul Men! As the wind is now blowing forty miles an hour it will be im possible to make passenger flights!"

Oh, bitter defeat for the Girl! For, this time, there had been no idyllic picnic *à deux* to console her for any disappointment. There had been nothing but a rather noisy tea in the Pavilion, with a whole chattering party of the young Airman's acquaintances; with another young woman who had meant to fly, but who had seemed resigned enough that it was "not to be, *this* afternoon," and with half a dozen strange, irrelevant young men; quite *silly*, Gwenna had thought them. Two of them had given Gwenna a lift back to Hampstead in their car afterwards, since Paul Dampier had explained that he "rather wanted to go on with one of the other fellows"—somewhere! Gwenna didn't know where. Only, out of her sight! Out of her world! And she was quite certain, even though he hadn't said so, that he had been bent on some quest that had something to do with the *Fiancée* of his, the "P.D.Q.," the Machine!

CHAPTER XIV

AN AWAKENING

THE sore of that jealousy still smarted in the girl's mind as she turned her pillow restlessly. . . . She could not sleep until long after the starlings had been twittering and the milk-carts rattling by in the suburban road outside. She woke, dispirited. She came down late for breakfast; Leslie had already gone off to her old lady in Highgate. Over the disordered breakfast-table Miss Armitage was making plans, with some of the other Suffrage-workers, to "speak" at a meeting of the Fabian Nursery. Those young women talked loudly enough, but they didn't pronounce the ends of any of their words; hideously slipshod it all sounded, thought the Welsh girl fretfully. Her world was a desert to her, this fine June morning. For at the Westminster office things seemed as dreary as they had at the Club. She began to see what people meant when they said that on long sea-voyages one of the greatest hardships was never to see a fresh face, but always the same ones, day after day, well-known to weariness, all about one. It was just like that when one was shut up to work day after day in an office with the same people. She was sick to death of all the faces of all the people here. Miss Butcher with her Cockney accent! Miss Baker with her eternal crochet! The men in the yards with their *awful* tobacco and trousers! Nearly all men, she thought,

were ugly. All old men. And most of the young ones; *round* backs, *horrid* hands, *disgusting* skins—Mr. Grant, for instance! (with a glance at that well-meaning engineer, when he brought in some note for Mabel Butcher). Those swarthy men never looked as if they had baths and proper shaves. He'd a head like a black hatpin. And his accent, thought the girl from the land where every letter of a word is pronounced, his accent was more excruciating than any in Westminster.

"Needn't b'lieve me, if you don't want. But it's true-oo! Vis'ters this aft'noon," he was saying to Miss Butcher. "Young French Dook or Comp or something, he is; taking out a patent for a new crane. Coming in early with some swagger friends of his. Wants to be shown the beauties of the buildin', I s'pose. Better bring him in here and let him have a good look at you girls first thing, hadn't I? S'long! Duty calls. I must away."

And away he went, leaving Miss Butcher smiling fondly after him, while Miss Williams wondered how on earth any girl ever managed to fall in love, considering there was nothing but young men to fall in love with. All ordinary young men were awful. And all young men *were* ordinary. . . . Except, now and again, one . . . far away . . . out of reach. . . . Who just showed how different and wonderful a thing a lover might be! If one could only, only ever get near him!—instead of being stuck down here, in this perfectly beastly place——

As the morning wore on, she found herself more and more dissatisfied with all her surroundings. And for a girl of Gwenna's sort to be thoroughly dissatisfied predicts one thing only. She will not long stay where she is.

Impatiently she sighed over her typing-table. Irritably she fidgeted in her chair. This was what jerked the plump arm of Ottilie Becker, who was passing behind her, and who now dropped a handful of papers on to the new boards.

"Zere! Now see what you have made me do," said the German girl good-naturedly enough. "My letter! Pick him up, Candlesticks-maker."

"Oh, pick him up yourself," retorted Gwenna school-girlishly, crossly. "It wasn't my fault."

At this tone from a colleague of whom she was genuinely fond, tears rose to Miss Becker's blue eyes. Miss Butcher, coming across to the centre table, saw those tears.

"Well, really, anybody might *apologize*," she remarked reproachfully, "when they've *upset* anybody."

At this rebuke Gwenna's strained nerves snapped.

An Aberystwith Collegiate School expression rose naturally to her lips—"*Cau dy gêg!*" She translated it: "Shut your mouth!" she said, quite rudely.

Then, the moment after she had given way to this little outburst of temper she felt better. She was ready to be on the best of terms again with her fellow-typists. They, as Miss Butcher would have said, "weren't having any." They turned offended backs upon her. They talked pointedly to each other, not to her.

"That's a precious long letter you've got written there, Baker," said Miss Butcher, helping to gather up the half-dozen thin foreign sheets, covered with neat, pointed German writing. "Is that to the beloved brother?"

Miss Becker nodded her plait-wreathed head as she put the letter that began: "*Geliebter Karl!*" into the grey-lined envelope.

"He likes to hear what they make—do—at the works. Always he ask," she said, "after what they do. And who come hier; and where everythings is kept."

"Gracious! I do believe he's a regular German spy, like in the magazines, this brother of yours," smiled Miss Butcher lightly. "Don't you give away any of our State secrets, Baker, will you? We'd be having the authorities, whoever they are, poking round and inquiring. Awful if England and your country went to war, wouldn't it?—and you were supposed to be 'the Enemy'!"

She spoke as if of something that was more fantastic than Gwenna's flying dream of the night before. The German typist answered in the same strain.

"If it *was* war, I would speak to Karlchen's regiment that your house in Clapham and your people should be saved," she promised. "But he is not thinking now of war; he interests himself very much for buildings (because our father is architect). And for maps of the river, and such. So I must write on him every week a long letter. . . . We go out to-day to have our lunch, yes?"

The two went out together towards Whitehall. The Welsh girl was left in Coventry—and the deserted offices.

She didn't want any lunch. She drank a glass of tepid tap-water from the dressing-room. She ate some strawberries, bought in their little flat basket as she had come along. Then, hatless, and in her thin, one-piece dress of grey linen, she strolled out into the yard for a breath of air.

It was empty and hot and sunny. Gwenna looked up from the wood-littered ground where the ubiquitous London pigeons strutted and flirted and "Croo—*croo-*

do—I—do "-ed about her feet. Overhead, that giant lacework on its iron crochet-hooks looked as if its pattern had been drawn with a pen and black ink against the opaque blue-grey sky. The sight of that far-off pinnacle put into her head again the thought of flying.

"I don't believe that I shall ever be as high up as that, with the blue beneath me, like I've always wanted!" reflected the young girl, dolefully looking up. "I believe that last night in my dream is all the flying I'm ever going to have had!"

And again that longing took her. That pure longing to be high; above the Law that clogs the children of Man to the Earth from which he came. To feel the unfettered air above and below and about her all at once! . . . But what could she do to gratify the impulse even a little?

Only one thing.

She might *climb*.

The idea with which she started off on her mad prank was to climb up to that iron lattice of lacework; to run up that as a sailor climbs the rope-ladders of his masts, and thence from the very highest peak attainable to look down on London, even as last night she had looked down on it from her dream.

Her start was not in the open air at all, but from the bottom of the scaffolding inside, where it was all beams and uprights and floors of planks. It reminded Gwenna of being underneath the old wooden pier at Aberdovey, and looking up. She went up ladders, through trap-doors, walked over wooden floors to other ladders until she got up to the last trap-door and through it out of the shadow and the stuffiness to the sunshine and the fresh air again. She stood on the top platform of the gantry which supported that engine and the wheels

that worked (she supposed) the iron lattice that was still far above her head.

Presently she would climb that. She knew that she could. She was never afraid of heights. Her head was steady enough. Her feet in their brown shoes were as sure as the feet of the tiny sheep that picked their way up the rocky steeps of her Welsh mountains. She could climb as well as any of the men . . . but for the moment she rested, standing by the platform hand-railing, breathing in the freshened breeze.

The birds of the City—pigeons and sparrows—were taking their short flights far beneath her perch. All London was spread below her, as it had been in that flying dream, and with as strong a sense of security as in the dream she looked down upon it.

There, between the forests of chimney-pots, gleamed that highway of the Thames, blue-grey now as it reflected the sky, winding out of the distance that meant the clean, green country and the willows below the lawns where people had danced; flowing on into London that sullied it, and burdened it with her barges, and spanned it with her bridges, but could not stay it; on and out its waters passed towards Greenwich and the Docks and the tall ships and the North Sea!

And there on its bank was the office, the dwindled yard from which Gwenna had started. The men returning. . . .

The whole place looked nothing more than a hen-run full of fowls. Their voices ascended, more loudly than she would have expected to hear from their diminished figures. How funny to see what midgets the creatures looked from here, and to remember how majestically important each considered himself! thought little Gwenna, forgetting that from the yard she herself, with her grey linen frock, her brown feet

and ankles, must look no larger than a roosting pigeon.

She looked down, past the railing and the ends of timbers, feeling immeasurably aloof from everybody in her world. She wished she need never go down to it again.

"I've a *good* mind to give notice at the office, whatever, and go somewhere quite different!" she thought defiantly, and immediately she felt elated. A weight of depression seemed to have dropped from her already. Up, up went the feather-weight spirits of Youth. She had forgotten for this moment the longing and frustration of the last weeks, the exasperations of this morning, her squabble with those other girls. She had climbed out of all that. . . .

Now, before she left this place, she would do something that none of the girls she knew would dare. She'd climb further.

She turned to take a step towards the crane.

Then something gave her a start as violent as that in which she had, that night before, been jerked out of her dream.

For now, into her absorbed musing there had broken without warning the sound of a voice. It had seemed to have come out of nothing, from behind her, and it had said, with a laugh deep and soft at once, "*My* machine? Oh, yes. . . . Good of you to remember her——"

Paul Dampier's voice!

Little Gwenna, with her back to the trap-door, and wrapped in her own thoughts, had heard nothing of the steps of five pairs of feet coming up the way that she had come. In the violence of her surprise of hearing a voice, so often heard in her daydreams now, here, in

this unexpected place between sky and ground, she started so that she lost her balance.

The girl's foot slipped. She fell. She was half over the platform—one small foot and ankle stretched out over the giddy height as that crane was stretched. She clutched on the crook of a slender grey arm, the railing of the platform—So, for an agonized moment, she hung.

But hardly had she cried out before there was the dash of a tall man's figure across the planks from the trap-door.

"It's all right—I've got you," said Paul Dampier, and caught her up from the edge, in his arms.

They held her. That armful of a girl, soft and warm as one of the grey pigeons, was crushed for a moment against the boy's chest. She was closer to him than she had been in any of those waltzes. Yet it seemed no strangeness to be so near—feeling his heart beat below hers, feeling the roughness of his tweed jacket through the thin linen of her frock. She felt as she'd felt about flying, in that dream of hers. "I must have known it all before."

Then, dazed but happy, resting where she seemed to belong, she thought in a twink, "I shall have to let go. *Why* can't I stay like this? . . . Oh, it's very cruel. There! Now I have let go. But he won't. . . . He's getting his balance."

He had taken a step backwards.

Then she slid through his arms. She slipped, lightly as a squirrel slips down the length of a beech, to the wooden floor of the platform.

Cruel; yes, *cruel!* And to add to the cruelty that such a moment must end, the Airman, when she left his enforced clasp, scarcely looked at her. He barely returned her greeting. He did not answer her breathless thanks. He turned away from her—whom he had

saved. Yes! He left her to the meaningless babble of the others (she recognized now, in a dazed way, that there were other men with him on the scaffolding). He left her to the politenesses of his cousin Hugo and of that young French engineer (Mr. Grant's "Comp" who had come up to inspect the crane). He never looked again as Miss Williams was guided down the trap-door and the ladders by the scolding Yorkshire foreman, who didn't leave her until she was safely at the bottom.

She was met by the two other typists who had, from the office window, seen her perched up, small as a bird, on the heights. Both girls had been terrified. Miss Butcher now brought lavender salts. Miss Becker's pink moon of a face was blanched with horror over her colleague's danger.

"Do you know what could have happened, Candlesticks-maker, my dear?" cried the German girl with real emotion, as they all made tea together in the varnished, stifling office. "You could have been killed, you!"

Gwenna thought, "That would have been too bad. Because then—*then* I shouldn't have known when he held me!"

* * * * * *

As it was, there were several things about that incident that the young girl—passionate and infatuated and innocent—did not know.

For one thing, there was the resolution that Paul Dampier took just after he had turned abruptly from her, had taken short leave of the others, and when he was striding down Whitehall to the bus that went past the door of his Camden Town rooms. And for another thing, there was the reason for that resolution.

Now, in the fairy-stories of modern life, it is (of the

two principals) not always the Princess who has to be woken by a kiss, a touch, from the untroubled sleep of years. Sometimes it is the Prince who is suddenly stirred, jarred, or jolted broad awake by the touch, in some form or other, of Love. In Paul Dampier's case the every-day miracle had been wrought by the soft weight of that dove-breasted girl against his heart for no longer than he could count ten, by her sliding to the earth through an embrace that he had not intended for an embrace at all.

It hadn't seemed to matter what *he* had intended!

In a flock as of homing pigeons there flew back upon the young aviator all at once his thoughts of the Little Thing ever since he'd met her.

How he'd thought her so jolly to look at ("So sensible"—this he forgot). How topping and natural it had seemed to sit there with her in that field, talking to her, drinking with her out of one silver cup. How he'd found himself wanting to touch her curls; to span and squeeze her throat with his hands. How he'd been within an inch of summarily kissing that fox-glove pink mouth of hers, that night at the Dance. . . .

And to-day, when he'd come to Westminster for another talk with that rather decent young Frenchman of Hugo's, when he hadn't thought of seeing the girl at all, what had happened? He'd actually held her clasped in his arms, as a sweetheart is clasped.

Only by a sheer accident, of course.

Yes, but an accident that had left impressed on every fibre of him the feeling of that warm and breathing burden which seemed even yet to rest against his quickened heart.

In that heart there surged up a clamorous impulse to go back at once. To snatch her up for the second time in his arms, and not to let her go again, either.

To satisfy that hunger of his fingers and lips for the touch of her——

"*Hold* hard!" muttered the boy to himself. "Hang it all, this won't do."

For he had found himself actually turning back, his face set towards the Abbey.

He spun round on the hot pavement towards home again.

"Look here; can't have this!" he told himself grimly as he walked on, swinging his straw hat in his hand, towards Trafalgar Square. "At this rate I shall be making an ass of myself before I know where I am; going and falling in—going and getting myself much too dashed fond of the Little Thing."

Yes! He now saw that he was in some danger of that.

And if it did come to anything, he mused, walking among the London summer crowd, it wouldn't be one of these Fancy-dress-dance flirtations. Not that sort of girl. "Nor was he; really." Not that sort of man, he meant. Sort of thing never had amused him, much; not, he knew, because he was cold-blooded ("Lord, no!") but partly because he'd had such stacks of other things to do, partly because—because he'd always thought it ought to be (and could be) so much more—well, amusing than it was. This other. This with the Little Thing—he somehow knew that it would have to be "for keeps."

And *that* he couldn't have. Good Lord, no! There could be no question—Great Scott!

For yes, if there *was* anything between him and the Little Thing, it would have to be an engagement. Marriage, and all that.

And Paul Dampier didn't intend to get married. Out of the question for him.

He'd only just managed to scrape through and make "some sort of a footing" for himself in the world as it was. His father, a hard-up Civil engineer, and his mother (who had been looked askance at by her people, the Swaynes, for marrying the penniless and undistinguished Paul Dampier, senior)—they'd only just managed to give their boy "some kind of an education" before they pegged out. Lessons at home when he'd been a little fellow. Afterwards one of the (much) smaller public-schools. For friends and pleasures and holidays he had been dependent on what he could "pick up" for himself. Old Hugo had been decent enough. He'd asked his cousin to fish with him in Wales, twice, and he hadn't allowed Paul to feel that he was—the poor relation.

Only Paul remembered the day that Hugo was going back to Harrow for the last time. He, Paul, had then been a year in the shops, to the day. He remembered the sudden resentment of that. It was not snobbery, not envy. It was Youth in him crying out, "I will be served! I won't be put off, and stopped doing things, and shoved out of things for ever, just because I'm poor. If being poor means being 'out of it,' having no Power of any kind, I'm dashed if I *stay* poor. I'll show that I can make good——"

And, gradually, step by step, the young mechanic, pilot, aero-racer and inventor had been "making good."

He'd made friends, too. People had been decent. He'd been made to feel that *they* felt he was going to be a useful sort of chap. He'd quailed a bit under the eyes of butlers in these houses where he'd stayed, but he'd been asked again. That Mrs. What's-her-name (the woman in the pink frock at the Smiths) had been awfully kind. Introducing him to her brothers with

capital; asking him down to the New Forest to meet some other influential person; and knowing that he couldn't entertain in return. (He'd just sent her some flowers and some tickets for Brooklands.) Then there was Colonel Conyers. He'd asked whether he (Dampier) were engaged. And, at his answer, had replied, "Good. Much easier for a bachelor, these days."

And now! Supposing he got married?

On his screw? Paul Dampier laughed bitterly.

Well, but supposing he got engaged; got some wretched girl to wait for——

Years of it! Thanks!

Then, quite apart from the money-question, what about all his work?

Everything he wanted to do! Everything he was really in earnest about.

His scheme—his invention—his Machine!

"End of it all, if he went complicating matters by starting a *girl!*"

Take up all his time. Interrupt—putting him off his job—yes, he knew! Putting him off, like this afternoon in the yard, and that other night at the Dance. Only more so. Incessant. "Mustn't have it; quite simply, he must *not.*"

Messing up his whole chance of a career, if——

But he was pulling himself up in time from that danger.

Up to now he hadn't realized that there might be something in all that rot of old Hugo's about the struggle in a man's mind between an Aeroplane and a Girl. Now—well, he'd realized. All the better. Now he was forewarned. Good thing he could take a side for himself now.

By the time he'd reached the door of the National Portrait Gallery and stood waiting for his motor omni-

bus, he had definitely taken that resolution of which Gwenna Williams did not know.

Namely, that he must drop seeing the Girl. Have nothing more to say to her. It was better so; wiser. Whatever he'd promised about taking her up would have to be "off."

A pity—! Dashed shame a man couldn't have *everything!* She was . . . so awfully sweet. . . .

Still, got to decide one way or the other.

This would fix it before it was too late, before he'd perhaps managed to put ideas into the head of the Little Thing. She shouldn't ever come flying, with him!

That *ended* it! he thought. He'd made up *his* mind. He would not allow himself to wonder what *she* might think.

After all, what *would* a girl think? Probably nothing.

Nothing at all, probably.

CHAPTER XV

LESLIE ON "TOO MUCH LOVE"

IT seemed to be decided for Gwenna that she should, after all, give notice at the office.

For on the evening of the day of her climb up the scaffolding she met the tall, sketchily-dressed figure of her chum coming down the hill that she was ascending on her way to the Club. And Leslie accosted her with the words, "Child, d'you happen to want to leave your place and take another job? Because, if so, come along for a walk and we'll talk about it."

So the two "inseparables" strolled on together up past the Club, passing at the crest of the hill a troop of Boy Scouts with their band.

"Only chance one ever gets of hearing a drum; jolly sound," sighed Leslie, watching the brown faces, the sturdy legs marching by. "I wonder how many of those lads will be soldiers? Very few, I suppose. We're told that the authorities are *so* careful to keep the Boy Scout Movement apart from any pernicious militarism, and ideas about National Service!"

And the girls took the road that dips downward from Hampstead, and the chestnut avenue that leads into the Park of Golders Green. They passed the Bandstand ringed by nurse-girls and perambulators. They crossed the rustic bridge above the lily-pond, where

children tossed crumbs to the minnows. They went in at the door of the little flower-garden.

Here, except for an occasional sauntering couple, London seemed shut out. In the late sunlight above the maze of paths, the roses were just at their best. Over the pergolas and arbours they hung in garlands, they were massed in great posies of pink and cream and crimson. The little fountain set in the square of velvet turf tossed up a spray of white mist touched with a rainbow, not unlike Gwenna's dance-frock.

The girls sat down on a shaded seat facing that fountain. Gwenna, turning to her chum, said, " Now do tell me about that job you asked if I'd take ? What is it ? "

" Oh ! it's a woman who used to know some of my people ; she came to the Club this afternoon, and then on to my old lady's to see me about it," said Leslie. " She wants a girl—partly to do secretarial work, partly to keep her company, partly to help her in the ' odd bits ' of her work down there where she has her business."

Gwenna, rather listlessly thinking of typewriting offices, of blouses, or tea-shops, asked what the lady did.

Leslie gave the extraordinary answer, " She builds aeroplanes."

" *She* does ? " cried Gwenna, all thrilled. " *Aeroplanes ?* "

" Yes. She's the only woman who's got an Aircraft Factory, men, shops and all. It's about an hour's run from town. She's a pilot herself, and her son's an aviator," said Leslie, speaking as though of everyday things. " Everything supplied, from the Man to the Machine, what ? "

" Oh ! But what a *gorgeous* sort of Life for a woman, Leslie ! " cried the younger girl, her face suddenly

alight. "Fancy spending her time making things like *that!* Things that are going to make a difference to the whole world! Instead of her just 'settling down' and embroidering 'duchesse sets,' and sitting with tea-cups, like Uncle Hugh's 'Lady parishioners,' and talking to callers about servants; and operations! Oh, oh, don't *you* want to take her job?"

"I'm not especially keen on one job more than another. And my old lady would be rather upset if I did leave her in the lurch," said Leslie, more unselfishly than her chum suspected. The truth was that this much disapproved-of Leslie had resigned a congenial post because it might mean what Gwenna loved. "I told the Aeroplane Lady about you," she added. "And she'd like you to go down and interview her at the Factory next Saturday, if you'd care to?"

"Care? Of *course* I'd care! Aeroplanes! After silly buildings and specifications!" exclaimed Gwenna, clasping her hands in her grey linen lap. But her face fell suddenly as she added, "But—it's an hour's run from London, you say? I should have to live there?"

"'*Away from Troilus, and away from Troy,*'" quoted Leslie smiling. "You could come back to Troy for week-ends, Taffy. And I'll tell you what. *It's no bad thing for a young man who's always thought of a girl as being planted in one particular place, to realize suddenly that she's been uprooted and set up in quite another place.* Gives him just a little jerk. By the way, is there any fresh news of Troilus—of the Dampier boy?"

And Gwenna, sitting there with troubled eyes upon the roses, gave her the history of that afternoon's adventure. She ended up sadly, "Never even said 'Good-bye' to me!"

" Getting nervous that he's going to like you too well ! " translated Leslie, without difficulty. " Probably deciding at this minute that he'd better not see much more of you——"

" Oh, Leslie ! " exclaimed the younger girl, alarmed.

" Sort of thing they *do* decide," said Leslie, lightly. " Well, we'll see what it amounts to. And we'll wire to-morrow to the Aeroplane Lady. Or telephone down to-night. I am going to telephone to Hugo Swayne to tell him I don't feel in the mood to have dinner out to-night again."

" Again ? " said Gwenna, rather wistfully, as they rose from the arbour and walked slowly down the path by the peach-houses. " Has he been asking you out *several* times, then ? "

" Several," said Leslie with a laugh. She added in her insouciant way, " You know, *he* wants to marry me now."

Gwenna regarded her with envy. Leslie spoke of what should be the eighth wonder of the world, the making or rejecting of a man's life. as if it were an everyday affair.

" Don't look so unflatteringly *surprised*, Taffy. Strictly pretty I may not be. But a scrupulously neat and lady-like appearance," mocked Leslie, putting out a long arm in a faded-silk sleeve that was torn at the cuff, " has often (they tell one) done more to win husbands than actual good looks ! "

Little Gwenna said, startled, " You aren't—aren't going to *let* Mr. Swayne be your husband, are you ? "

" I don't know," said Leslie, reflectively, a little wearily. " I don't know, yet. He's fat—but of course *that* would come off after I'd worried him for a year or so. He's flabby. He's rather like Kipling's person whose *' rooms at College was beastly ! '* But

he's good-natured, and his people were all right, and, Taffy, he's delightfully well-off. And when one's turned twenty-six, one does want to be *sure* of what's coming. One must have some investment that'll bring in one's frocks and one's railway-fares and one's proper setting."

"There are other things," protested little Gwenna with a warm memory of that moment's clasping on the heights that afternoon. "There are things one wants more."

"Not me."

"Ah! That's because you don't *know* them," declared Gwenna, flushed.

And at that the elder girl gave a very rueful laugh.

"Not know them? I've known them too well," she admitted. "Listen, Taffy, I'll tell you the sort of girl I am. I'm afraid there are plenty of us about."

She sighed, and went on with a little nod.

"We're the girl who works in the sweetshop and who never wants to touch chocolates again. We're the sort of girl who's been turned loose too early at dances and studio-parties and theatricals and so forth. The girl who's come in for too much excitement and flattery and love-making. Yes! For in spite of all my natural disadvantages (tuck in that bit of hair for me, will you?) and in *spite* of not being quite a fool—I've been made too much of, by men. The Monties and so forth. *Here's where I pay for it.* I and the girls like me. We can't ever take a real live interest in men again!"

"But——!" objected Gwenna, seeing a mental image of Leslie as she had been at that dance, whirling and flushed and radiant. "You *seem* to like——"

"'*The chase, not the quarry,*'" quoted Leslie. "For when I've brought down my bird, what happens?—

He doesn't amuse me any more! It's like having sweets to eat and such a cold that one can't taste 'em."

" But—that's such a *pity!* "

" D'you suppose I don't *know* that? " retorted Miss Long. " D'you suppose I don't wish to Heaven that I could be ' in Love ' with somebody? I can't, though. I see through men. And I don't see as much in them as there is in myself. They can't boss *me*, or take *me* out of myself, or surprise *me* into admiring them. Why can't they, *dash* them? they can't even *say* anything that I can't think of, quicker, first! " complained the girl with many admirers, resentfully. " And that's a fatal thing to any woman's happiness. Remember, there's no fun for a woman in just *being* adored! "

The girl in love, kicking her small brown shoe against the pebbles of the garden path, sighed that she wished that she could try " being adored." Just for a change.

" Ah, but you, Taffy, you're lucky. You're so fresh, so eager. You're as much in love with that aviator's job as you are with anything else about him. You're as much amused by ' ordinary things ' as any other girl is amused by getting a young man. As for what you feel about the young man himself, well!—I suppose *that's* a tune played half a yard to the right of the key-board of an ordinary girl's capacity. You're keen for Life; you've got what men call ' *a thirst you couldn't buy.*' Wish I were like that! "

" Well, but it's so easy to be," argued Gwenna, " when you *do* meet someone so wonderful——"

" It's not so easy to see ' wonder,' let me tell you. It's a gift. I've had it; lost it; spoilt it," mourned the elder girl. " To you everything's thrilling: their blessed airships—the men in them—the Air itself.

All miracles to you! Everything's an Adventure. So would Marriage be——"

"Oh, I don't—don't ever think of *that*. Being always *with* a person! Oh, it would be *too* wonderful—— I shouldn't expect—even to be a little *liked*, if he once told me so, would be enough," whispered the little Welsh girl, so softly that her chum did not catch it.

Leslie, striding along, said, "To a girl like me all that's as far behind as the school-room. At the stage where I am, a girl looks upon Marriage—how? As '*The Last 'Bus Home, or A Settled Job at last.*' That's why she so often ends up as an old man's darling—with some very young man as her slave. That's what makes me ready to accept Hugo Swayne. And now forget I ever told you so."

The two girls turned homewards; Gwenna a little sad.

To think that Leslie should lack what even ordinary little Mabel Butcher had! To think that Leslie, underneath all her gaiety and rattle, should not know any more the taste of real delight!

Gwenna, the simple-hearted, did not know the ways of self-critics. She did not guess that possibly Miss Long had been analysing her own character with less truth than gusto: . . . And she was surprised when, as they passed the Park gates again, her chum broke the silence with all her old lightness of tone.

"Talking of young men—a habit for which Leslie never bothers to apologize—talking of young men, I believe there might be some at the Aeroplane Lady's place. She often has someone there. A gentleman—'prentice or pupil or something of that sort. Might be rather glad to see a new pretty face about with real curls."

It was then that Gwenna turned up that blushing but rather indignant little face. " But, Leslie! Don't you *understand?* If there were a million other young men about, all thinking me—all thinking what you say, it wouldn't make a *bit* of difference to *me!* "

" Possibly not," said Miss Long, " but there's no reason why it shouldn't be made to make a difference to the Dampier boy, is there? "

" What d'you mean, Leslie? " demanded the other girl as they climbed the hill together. For the first time a look of austerity crossed Gwenna's small face. For the first time it seemed to her that the adored girl-chum was in the wrong. Yes! She had never before been shocked at Leslie, whatever wild thing she said. But now—now she was shocked. She was disappointed in her. She repeated, rebukefully, " What do you mean? "

" What," took up Leslie, defiantly, " do you think I meant? "

" Well—*did* you mean make—make Mr. Dampier think other people liked me, and that I might like somebody else better than *him?* "

" Something of the sort *had* crossed the mind of Leslie the Limit."

" Well, then, it isn't *like* you——"

" Think not? " There was more than a hint of quarrel in both the girlish voices. Up to now they had never exchanged a word that was not of affection, of comradeship.

Gwenna, flushing deeper, said, " It's—it's *horrid* of you, Leslie."

" Why, pray? "

" Because it would be sort of *deceiving* Mr. Dampier, for one thing. It's a *trick.*"

" M'yes! "

"And not a pretty one, either," said little Gwenna, red and angry now. "It's—it's——"

"What?"

"Well, it's what I should have thought that you yourself, Leslie, would have called '*so obvious.*'"

"Exactly," agreed Miss Long, with a flippant little laugh that covered smarting feelings. *Taffy* had turned against her now! Taffy, who used to think that Leslie could do no wrong! This was what happened when one's inseparable chum fell in love. . . .

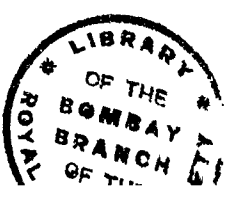
Leslie said impenitently, "I've never yet found that '*the obvious thing*' was '*the unsuccessful thing.*' Especially when it comes to anything to do with young men. My good child, you and the Dampier boy, you

> '*Really constitute a pair,*
> *Each being rather like an artless woodland elf.*'

I mean, can't you see that the dear old-fashioned simple remedies and recipes remain the best? For a sore throat, black-currant tea. (Never fails!) For the hair, Macassar oil. (Unsurpassed since the Year Eighteen-dot!) For the stimulation of an admirer's interest, jealousy. Jealousy and competition, Taffy."

"He isn't an admirer," protested the younger girl, mollified. Then they smiled together. The cloud of the first squabble had passed.

Leslie said, "Never mind. If you don't approve of my specific, don't think of it again."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CHAPTER XVI

THE AEROPLANE LADY

CURIOUSLY enough, Gwenna did think of it again.

On the Saturday morning after that walk and talk she took that long dull train-journey. The only bright spot in it was the passing of Hendon Flying Ground. Over an hour afterwards she arrived at the little station, set in a sunburnt waste, for the Aircraft Works.

She asked her way of the ticket-collector at the booking-office. But before he could speak, she was answered by someone else, who had come down to the station for a parcel. This was a shortish young man in greasy blue overalls. He had a smiling, friendly, freckled face under a thatch of brilliant red hair; and a voice that seemed oddly out of keeping with his garments. It was an "Oxford" voice.

"The Works? I'm just going on there myself. I'll come with you and show you, if I may," he said with evident zest.

Gwenna, walking beside him, wished that she had not immediately remembered Leslie's remarks about young men at aircraft works who might be glad of the arrival of a new pretty face. This young man, piloting her down a straggling village street that seemed neither town nor country, told her at once that he was a pupil at the Works and asked whether she herself were going to help Mrs. Crewe there.

"I don't know yet," said Gwenna. "I hope so."

"So do I," said the young man gravely, but with a glint of unreserved admiration in the eyes under the red thatch.

Little Gwenna, walking very erect, wished that she were strong and self-reliant enough not to feel cheered by that admiration.

(But she was cheered. No denying that!)

The young man took her down a road flanked on either hand by sparse hedges dividing it from that parched and uninteresting plain. The mountain-bred girl found all this flat country incredibly ugly. Only, on her purple Welsh heights and in the green ferny depths threaded by crystal water, nothing ever happened. It was here, in this half-rural desert littered by builders' rubbish and empty cans, that Enterprise was afoot. Strange!

* * * * * *

On the right came an opening. She saw a yard with wooden débris and what looked like the wrecks of a couple of motor-cars. Beyond was a cluster of buildings with corrugated iron roofs.

The red-haired pupil mentioned the name of the Aeroplane Lady and said, "I think you'll find her in the new Wing-room, over here——"

"What a wonderful name for it," thought the little enthusiast, catching her breath, as she was shown through a door. "The Wing-room!"

It was high and clean and spacious, with white distempered walls and a floor of wood-dura, firm yet comforting to the feet. The atmosphere of it was, on that July day, somewhat overpowering. Two radiators were working, and the air was heavy with a smell of what seemed like rubber-solution and spirits mixed: this,

Gwenna presently found, was the " dope " to varnish the strong linen stretched across the wings of aeroplanes. Two of those great wings were laid out horizontally on trestles to dry. Another of the huge sails with cambered sections was set up on end across a corner ; and from behind it there moved, stepping daintily and majestically across the floor, the tawny shape of a Great Dane, who came inquiringly up to the stranger.

Then from behind the screening wing there came a slight, woman's figure in dark blue. She followed the dog. Little Gwenna Williams, standing timidly in that great room so strange and white, and characteristically scented, found herself face to face with the mistress of the place ; the Aeroplane Lady.

Her hair was greying and fluffy as a head of wind-blown Traveller's Joy ; beneath it her eyes were blue and young and bright and—yes ! with a little glad start Gwenna recognized that in these eyes too there was something of that space-daring gleam of the eyes of Icarus, of her own Flying Man.

" Ah . . . I know," said the lady briskly. " You're the girl Leslie's sent down to see me."

" Yes," said Gwenna, thinking it nice of her to say " Leslie " and not " Miss Long." She noticed also that the Aeroplane Lady wore at the collar of her shirt a rather wonderful brooch in the shape of the *caducæus*, the serpent-twisted rod of Mercury. " Oh, I *do* hope she'll take me ! " thought the young girl, agitated. " I do want more than anything to come here to work with her. Oh, supposing she thinks I'm too silly and young to be any use—supposing she won't take me——"

She was tense with nervousness while the Aeroplane Lady, fondling the Great Dane's tawny ear with a small, capable hand as she spoke, put the girl through a short catechism ; asking questions about her age, her people,

her previous experience, her salary. . . . And then she was told that she might come and work on a month's trial at the Factory, occupying a room in the Aeroplane Lady's own cottage in the village. The young girl, enraptured, put down her success to the certificates from that Aberystwyth school of hers, where she had passed " with distinction " the Senior Cambridge and other examinations. She did not guess that the Aeroplane Lady had taken less than two minutes to make sure that this little Welsh typist-girl carried out what Leslie Long had said of her.

Namely that " she was so desperately keen on anything to do with flying and flyers that she'd scrub the floors of the shops for you if you wished it, besides doing your business letters as carefully as if each one was about some important Diplomatic secret . . . try her ! "

So on the following Monday Gwenna began her new life.

At first this new work of Gwenna's consisted very largely of what Leslie had mentioned; the writing-out of business letters at the table set under the window in the small private office adjoining the great Wing-room.

(Curious that the Wings for Airships, the giant butterfly aeroplanes themselves, should grow out of a chrysalis of ordinary business, with letters that began, " *Sir, we beg to thank you for your favour of the 2nd instant, and to assure you that same shall receive our immediate attention,*" exactly the sort of letters that Gwenna had typed during all those weeks at Westminster !)

Then there were orders to send off for more bales of the linen that was stretched over the membranes of those wings; or for the great reels of wire which strung the machines, and which cost fifteen pounds apiece;

orders for the metal which was to be worked in the shops across the parched yard, where men of three nationalities toiled at the lathe; turning-screws, strainers, washers, and all the tiny, complicated-looking parts that were to be the bones and the sinews and the muscles of the finished Flying Machine.

Gwenna, the typist, had at first only a glimpse or so of these other sides of the Works.

Once, on a message from some visitor to the Aeroplane Lady she passed through the great central room, larger than her Uncle's chapel at home, with its concrete floor and the clear diffused light coming through the many windows, and the never-ceasing throb of the gas-driven engine pulsing through the lighter sounds of chinking and hammering. Mechanics were busy all down the sides of this hall; in the aisle of it, three machines in the making were set up on the stands. One was ready all but the wings; its body seemed now more than it would ever seem that of a giant fish; it was covered with the doped linen that was laced at the seams with braid, eyelets and cord, like an old-fashioned woman's corset. The second was half-covered. The third was all as yet uncovered, and looked like the skeleton of a vast seagull cast up on some prehistoric shore.

Wondering, the girl passed on, to find her employer. She found her in the fitter's shop. In a corner, the red-haired pupil, with goggles over his eyes, was sitting at a stand working an acetylene blow-pipe; holding in his hand the intense jet that shot out showers of squib-like sparks, and wielding a socket, the Lady directing him. She took the girl's message, then walked back with her to the office, her tawny dog following at her heels.

"Letters finished? . . . then I'd like you to help me on with the wings of that machine that's all but done,"

she said. "That is"—she smiled—"if you don't mind getting your hands all over this beastly stuff——"

Mind? Gwenna would have plastered her whole little white body with that warmed and strongly-smelling dope if she'd thought that by so doing she was actually taking a hand in the launching of a Ship for the Clouds.

The rest of the afternoon she spent in the hot and reeking Wing-room, working side by side with the Aeroplane Lady. Industriously she pasted the linen strips, patting them down with her little fingers on to the seams of those wide sails that would presently be spread —for whom?

In her mind it was always one large and springy figure that she saw ascending into the small plaited wicker seat of the Machine. It was always the same careless, blonde, lad's face that she saw tilted slightly against the background of plane and wires. . . .

"I would love to work, even a little, on a machine that he was going to fly in," thought Gwenna.

She stood, enveloped in a grey-blue overall, at the trestle-table, cutting out fresh strips of linen with scissors that were sticky and clogged with dope. She peeled the stuff from her hands in flakes like the bark of a silver-birch as she added to her thought, "But I shouldn't want to do anything for that aeroplane; his *Fiancée*, for the P.D.Q. Hateful creature, with her claws that she doesn't think are going to let him go!"

Here she set the pannikin of dope to reheat, and there was a smile of defiance on the girl's lips as she moved about from the trestles to the radiator or the sewing-table.

For ever since she had been at the Works a change had come over Gwenna.

Curiously enough, she was happier now than she had been in her life. She was more contented with what the

present brought her; more steadily hopeful about the future. It didn't seem to matter to her now that, the last time she had seen him, her Aviator had turned almost sullenly away. She laughed to herself over that, for she believed at last in Leslie's theory: "Afraid he's going to like me." She did not fret because she hadn't had even one of his brief notes since she had left London; nor sigh over the fact that she, living down here in this Bedfordshire village, was so much further away from those rooms of his at Camden Town than she had been when she had stayed at the Hampstead Club.

For somehow she felt nearer to him now.

Absence can, in some subtle, unexplained way, spin fine threads of communication over the gulf between a boy and a girl. . . .

She found a conviction growing stronger and stronger in her girl's mind, that gay, tangled chaos where faults and faculties, blindness and intuitions flourish entwined and inseparable. *She was meant to be his.*

She'd no "reason" for thinking so, of course. There was very little reason about Gwenna's whole make-up.

For instance, Leslie had tried "reasoning" with her, the night before she'd left the Hampstead Club. Leslie had taken it into her impish black head to be philosophical, and to attempt to talk her chum into the same mood.

Leslie, the nonchalant, had given a full hour to her comments on Marriage. We will allow her a full chapter—but a short one.

CHAPTER XVII

LESLIE ON "MARRIAGE"

SHE'D said, "Supposing the moon *did* fall into your lap, Taffy? Suppose that young Cloud-Dweller of yours did (a) take you flying, and (b) propose to you?" and she'd recited solemnly:

"Somewhere I've read that the gods, waxing wroth at our mad importunity,
Hurl us our boon and it falls with the weight of a curse at our feet;
Perilous thing to intrude on their lofty Olympian immunity!
'Take it and die,' say the gods, and we die of our fondest conceit."

"Yes; 'of' it! After *having* it. Who'd mind dying *then?*"

"But if it hadn't been worth it, Taffy? Suppose you were air-sick?" Leslie had suggested. "Worse, suppose you were Paul-sick?"

"*What?*"

"Yes, supposing that Super-Boy of yours himself was the disappointment? Suppose none of his 'little ways' happened to please you? Men don't realize it, but, in love, a man is much easier to please than a woman!"

"No, Leslie. No," had come from the girl who knew nothing of love-making—less than nothing, since she *thought* she knew.

Leslie had persisted. "The first pet-name a man calls you—awfully important, that!—may hash up Love's

young dream for ever. Some men, I believe, begin with 'Dear old—something or other.' That's the *end.* Or something that you know you're obviously *not.* Such as 'Little Woman,' to *me.* Or they don't notice something that's specially there for them to notice. That's unforgivable. Or they do notice something that's quite beside the mark. Or they repeat themselves. Not good enough, a man who can't think of *one* new way of saying he cares, each day. (Even a calendar can do that.) Saying the wrong thing, though, isn't as bad as being *silent.* That's fatal. Gives a girl *such* a lot of time to imagine all the things that another man might have been saying at the time. That's why men with no vocabularies ought never to get engaged or married. '*I'm a man of few words,*' they say. They ought to be told, '*Very well. Outside! It simply means you won't trouble to amuse me.*' Exit the Illusion.

> '*Alas, how easily things go wrong!*
> *A look too short, or a kiss too long——*'

(Especially with a look too short.) Yes," Leslie had concluded impressively, "suppose the worst tragedy happened? *Suppose* the Dampier boy did get engaged to you, and then you found out that he didn't in the least know how to make love? To make love to *you,* I mean."

"There wouldn't have to be any love '*made,*'" little Gwenna had murmured, flushing. "Where he was, the love would *be.*"

"My dear, you *are* what Hugo Swayne calls '*a Passé-iste*' in love. Why, why wasn't *I* brought up in the heart of the mountains (and far away from any other kind of heart) until I was twenty-two, and then hurled into a love-affair with the first decent-looking young man?" Leslie had cried, with exaggerated

envy. "The happier you! But, Taff, do remember that 'Love. is a Lad with Wings'—like yours. Even if the engagement were all your fancy painted, that Grand Firework Display sort of feeling couldn't *last.* Don't shoot! It's true. People couldn't go on living their lives and earning their livings and making their careers and having their babies if it *did* last. It *must* alter. It *must* die down into the usual dear old sun rising every morning. So, when your '*Oiseau de feu*' married you, and you found he was just—a husband, like everybody else's——"

"Not 'like' anybody!"—indignantly.

"How d'you know *what* he's like?" Leslie had demanded. "What d'you know of his temper? Men with that heather-honey kind of smile and those deep dimples very often have a beastly temper. Probably jealous——"

"I would *love* him to be that."

"You wouldn't love to be poor, though," Leslie had gone off on another tack. "Poor, and uncomfortable."

"I shall never be comfortable again without him," Gwenna had said obstinately. "Might as well be uncomfortable *with* him!"

"In a nasty little brick villa near Hendon, so as to be close to the flying, perhaps? With a horrid dark bathroom? And the smell of cooking haddocks and of Lux all over it!" Leslie had enlarged. "And you having to use up all your own little tiny income to help pay the butcher, and the Gas Light and Coke Company, and the rates, and loathsome details of that sort that a woman never feels a ha'porth the better for! Instead of being able to get yourself fresh gloves and silk stockings and a few trifles of that sort that make absolutely *all* the difference to a woman's life!"

"Not *all* the difference, indeed," Gwenna had said

softly. But Leslie had continued to draw these fancy pictures of married life as lived with Mr. Paul Dampier.

"Taffy, for one thing, you've never seen him anything but nicely-groomed and attractive to look at. You try to imagine him in what Kipling calls '*the ungirt hour.*' They talk of a woman's slatternliness killing love. Have they seen a *man* when he '*hasn't bothered*' to groom himself? That sight——"

She had shaken her black head ineffably over the mental image of it, and had averred, "That sight ought to be added to the Valid and Legitimate Causes for Divorce! A wife ought to be able to consider herself as free as air after the first time that she sees her husband going about the house without a collar. Sordid, unbecoming grey flannel about his neck. Three half buttons, smashed in the wringer, hanging by their last threads to his shirt. And his old slippers bursting out at the side of the toe. And his 'comfortable' jacket on, with matches and fur in all the pockets and a dab of marmalade—also furred—on the front. And himself unshaved, with a zig-zag parting to his hair. I believe some men do go about like this before their wives, and then write wistful letters to the *Daily Mirror* about, 'Why is Marriage the Tomb of Romance?'"

Gwenna had sniffed. "Oh! *Some* men! *Those!*"

"Valid cause for Divorce Number Ninety-three: The state of the bedroom floor," Leslie had pursued. "I, slut as I am, do pick things up sometimes. Men, never. Ask any married woman you know. Maudie told *me*. Everything is hurled down, or stepped out of, or merely dropped. And left. Left, my child, for *you* to gather up. Everything out of the chest-of-drawers tossed upon the carpet. Handkerchiefs, dirty old pipes, shirts, ties, '*in one red burial blent.*' That means he's been 'looking for' something. Mind,

you've got to find it. Men are born 'find-silly.' Men never yet have found anything (except the North Pole and a few things like that, that are no earthly good in a villa), but they are for ever *losing* things!"

Gwenna had given a smile to the memory of a certain missing collar-stud that she had heard much of.

"Yes, I suppose to be allowed to find his collar-studs is what he'd consider '*Paradise enow*' for any girl!" Leslie had mocked. "I misdoubt me that the Dampier boy would settle down after a year of marriage into a regular Sultan of the Hearthrug. Looking upon his wife as something that belongs to him, and goes about with him; like a portmanteau. Putting you in your place as '*less than the dust beneath his chariot*,' that is, '*beneath his biplane wheels.*'"

"Leslie! I shouldn't mind! I'd *like* to be! I believe it *is* my place," Gwenna had interrupted, lifting towards her friend a small face quivering with conviction. "He could make anything he liked or chose of me. What do I care——"

"Not for clothes flung down in rings all over the floor like when a trout's been rising? Nor for trousers left standing there like a pair of opera-glasses —or concertinas? Braces all tangled up on the gas-bracket? Overcoat and boots crushing your new hat on the bed? Seventeen holey socks for you to mend? *All* odd ones—for *you* to sort——"

Little Gwenna had cried out: "I'd *want* to!"

"I'm not afraid you won't get what you want," Leslie had said finally. "All I hope is that your wish won't fail when you get it!"

And of that Gwenna was never afraid.

"I should not care for him so much if he were not the only one who could make me so happy," she told herself; "and *unless* the woman's very happy, surely the

man can't be? It must mean, then, that he'll feel, some day, that this would be the way to happiness. I'm sure there are *some* marriages that are different from what Leslie says. Some where you go on being sweethearts even after you're quite old friends, like. I—I could make it like that for him. I *feel* I could!"

Yes; she felt that some day (perhaps not soon) she must win him.

Sometimes she thought that this might be when her rival, the perfected machine, had made his name and absorbed him no longer. Sometimes, again, she told herself that he might have no success at all.

"Then, *then* he'd see there was *something* else in the world. Then he would turn to me," said the girl to herself. She added, as every girl in love must add, "No one *could* care as I do."

And one day she found on the leaf of the tear-off calendar in her cottage bedroom a line of verse that seemed to have been written for her. It remained the whole of Browning as far as Gwenna Williams was concerned. And it said:

"What's Death? You'll love me yet!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OBVIOUS THING

SHE was in this mood to win a waiting game on the day that Paul Dampier came down to the Aircraft Works.

This was just one of the more wonderful happenings that waited round the corner and that the young girl might hope to encounter any day.

The first she knew of it was from hearing a remark of the Aeroplane Lady's to one of her French mechanics at the lathes.

"This will make the eighteenth pattern of machine that we've turned out from this place," she said. "I wonder if it's going to answer, André?"

"Which machine, madame?" the man asked. He was a big fellow, dark and thick-haired and floridly handsome in his blue overalls; and his bright eyes were fixed interestedly upon his principal as she explained through the buzz and the clack and the clang of machinery in the large room, "This new model that Colonel Conyers wants us to make for him."

Gwenna caught the name. She thought breathlessly, "That's *his* machine! He's got Aircraft Conyers to take it up and have it made for him! It's *his!*"

She'd thought this, even before the Aeroplane Lady concluded, "It's the idea of a young aviator I know. Such a nice boy: Paul Dampier of Hendon."

The French mechanic put some question, and the Aeroplane Lady answered, " Might be an improvement. I hope so. I'd like him to have a show, anyhow. He's sending the engine down to-morrow afternoon. They'll bring it on a lorry. Ask Mr. Ryan to see about the unloading of it ; I may not get back from town before the thing comes."

Now Mr. Ryan was that red-haired pupil who had conducted Gwenna from the station on the day of her first appearance at the Works. Probably Leslie Long would have affirmed that this Mr. Ryan was also a factor in the change that was coming over Gwenna and her outlook. Leslie considered that no beauty treatment has more effect upon the body and mind of a woman than has the regular application of masculine admiration. Admiration was now being lavished by Mr. Ryan upon the little new typist with the face of a baby-angel and the small, rounded figure ; and Mr. Ryan saw no point in hiding his approval. It did not stop at glances. Before a week had gone by he had informed Miss Williams that she was a public benefactor to bring anything so delightful to look at as herself into those beastly, oily, dirty shops; that he hated, though, to see a woman with such pretty fingers having to mess 'em up with that vile dope ; and that he wondered she hadn't thought of going on the stage.

" But I can't act," Gwenna had told him.

" What's that got to do with it ? " the young man had inquired blithely. " All they've got to do is to *look*. You could beat 'em at that."

" Oh, what nonsense, Mr. Ryan ! " the girl had said, more pleased than she admitted to herself, and holding her curly head erect as a brown tulip on a sturdy stem.

"Not nonsense at all," he argued. "I tell you, if you went into musical comedy and adopted a strong enough Cockney accent there'd be another Stage and Society wedding before you could say 'knife.' You could get any young peer to adore you, Miss Gwenna, if you smiled at him over the head of a toy pom and called him 'Fice.' I can just see you becoming a Gaiety puss and marrying some Duke——"

"I don't want to marry any Dukes, thanks."

"I'm sure I don't want you to," Mr. Ryan had said softly. "I'd miss you too much myself. . . ."

The fact is that he was a flirt for the moment out of work. He was also of the type that delights in the proximity of 'Girl'—using the word as one who should say "Game." "Girl" suggested to him, as to many young men, a collective mass of that which is pretty, soft, and to-be-made-love-to. He found it pleasant to keep his hand in by paying these compliments to this new instalment of Girl—who was rather a little pet, he thought, though *rather* slow.

As for Gwenna, she bloomed under it, gaining also in poise. She learned to take a compliment as if it were an offered flower, instead of dodging it like a brick-bat, which is the very young girl's failing. She found that even if receiving a compliment from the wrong man is like wearing a right-hand glove on the left hand, it is better than having no gloves. (Especially it is better than *looking* as if one had no gloves.)

The attentions of young Ryan, his comment on a new summer frock, the rose laid by him on her desk in the morning; these things were not without their effect—it was a different effect from any intended by the red-haired pupil, who was her teacher in all this.

She would find herself thinking, "He doesn't look at

me nearly so much, I notice, in a trimmed-up hat, or a 'fussy' blouse. Men don't like them on me, perhaps." (That blouse or hat would be discarded.) Or, "Well! if so-and-so about me pleases him, it'll please other men."

And for "men" she read always, always the same one. She never realized that if she had not met Paul Dampier she *might* have fallen in love with young Peter Ryan. Presently he had begged her to call him "Peter."

She wouldn't.

"I think I'd do anything for you," young Ryan had urged, "if you asked for it, using my Christian name!"

Gwenna had replied: "Very well! If there's anything I ever want, frightfully badly, that you could give me, I shall ask for it like that."

"You mean there's nothing *I* could give you?" he had reproached her, in the true flirt's tone. It can sound so much more tender, at times, than does the tone of the truest lover. A note or so of it had found its way into Gwenna's soft voice these days.

Yes; she had half unconsciously learned a good deal from Mr. Ryan.

* * * * * *

"I say! Miss Gwenna!"

Mr. Ryan's rust-red head was popped round the door of the Wing-room where Gwenna, alone, was pouring dope out of the tilted ten-gallon can on the floor into her little pannikin.

"Come out for just one minute."

"Too busy," demurred the girl. "No time."

"Not just to look," he pleaded, "at the really *pretty* job I'm making of unloading this lorry with Dampier's engine?"

Quickly Gwenna set down the can and came out,

in her pinafore, to the breezes and sunshine of the yard outside. It was as much because she wanted to see what there was to be seen of that "*Fiancée*" of the aviator's, as because this other young man wanted her to admire the work of his hands.

Those hands themselves, Gwenna noticed, were masked and thick, half way up his forearms, with soft soap. This he seemed to have been smearing on certain boards, making a sliding way for that precious package that stood on the low lorry. The boards were packed up in banks and stages, an irregular stairway. This another assistant was carefully trying with a long straight edge with a spirit level in the middle of it; and a third man stood on the lorry, resting on a crowbar and considering the package that held the heart of Paul Dampier's machine.

"You see if she doesn't come down as light as a bubble and stop exactly *there*," said Mr. Ryan complacently, digging his heel into a pillowy heap of debris. "Lay those other planks to take her inside, André." He wiped his brow on a moderately clear patch of forearm, and moved away to check the observations of the man in the shirt-sleeves.

Gwenna, watching, could not help admiring both this self-satisfied young mudlark and his job. This was how women liked to see men busy: with strenuous work that covered them with dirt and sweat, taxing their brains and their muscles at the same time. Those girls who were so keen on the Enfranchisement of Women and "Equal Opportunities" and those things, those suffragettes at her Hampstead Club who "couldn't see where the superiority of the male sex was supposed to come in"—Well! The reason why they "couldn't" was (the more primitive Gwenna thought) simply because they didn't see enough men

at *this* sort of thing. The men these enlightened young women knew best sat indoors all day, writing —*that* sort of thing. Or talking about fans, like Mr. Swayne, and about "the right tone of purple in the curtains" for a room. The women, of course, could do that themselves. They could also go to colleges and pass men's exams. Lots did. But (thought Gwenna) not many of them could get through the day's work of Mr. Ryan, who had also been at Oxford, and who not only had forearms that made her own look like ivory toys, but who could plan out his work so that if he said that that squat, ponderous case would "stop exactly *there*"—stop there it would. She watched; the breeze rollicking in her curls, spreading the folds of her grey-blue pinafore out behind her like a sail, moulding her skirt to her rounded shape as she stood.

Then she turned with a very friendly and pretty smile to young Ryan.

It was thus that Paul Dampier, entering the yard from behind them, came upon the girl whom he had decided not to see again.

He knew already that "his little friend," as old Hugo insisted upon calling her, had taken a job at the Aircraft Works. He'd heard that from his cousin, who'd been told all about it by Miss Long.

And considering that he'd made up his mind that it would be better all round if he were to drop having anything more to say to the girl, young Dampier was glad, of course, that she'd left town. That would make things easier. He wouldn't seem to be avoiding her, yet he needn't set eyes upon her again.

Of course he'd been glad. He hadn't *wanted* to see her.

Then, at the end of his negotiations with Colonel Conyers, he'd understood that he would have to go over and pay a visit to the Aeroplane Lady. And even in the middle of the new excitement he had remembered that this was where Gwenna Williams was working. And for a moment he'd hesitated. That would mean seeing the Little Thing again after all.

Then he'd thought, Well? Fellow can't *look* as if he were trying to keep out of a girl's way? Besides, chances were he wouldn't see her when he did go, he'd thought.

It wasn't likely that the Aeroplane Lady kept her clerk, or whatever she was, in her pocket, he'd thought.

He'd just be taken to where the P.D.Q. was being assembled, he'd supposed. The Little Thing would be kept busy with her typing and one thing and another in some special office, he'd expected!

What he had *not* expected to find was the scene before him. The Little Thing idling about outside the shops here; hatless, pinafored, looking absolutely top-hole and perfectly at home, chatting with the ginger-haired bloke who was unloading the engine as if he were no end of a pal of hers! She was smiling up into his face and taking a most uncommon amount of interest, it seemed, in what the fellow had been doing!.

And, before, she'd said she wasn't interested in machinery! thought Dampier as he came up, feeling suddenly unconscionably angry.

He forgot the hours that the Little Thing had already passed in hanging on every word, mostly about a machine, that had fallen from his own lips. He only remembered that moment at the Smiths' dinner-

party, when she'd admitted that that sort of thing didn't appeal to her.

Yet, here she was! *Deep* in it, by Jove!.

He had come right up to her and this other chap before they noticed him. . . .

She turned sharply at the sound of the young aviator's rather stiff "Good afternoon."

She had expected that day to see his engine—no more. Here he stood, the maker of the engine, backed by the scorched, flat landscape, in the sunlight that picked out little clean-cut, intense shadows under the rim of his straw hat, below his cleft chin, along his sleeve and the lapel of his jacket, making him look (she thought) like a very good snapshot of himself. He had startled her again; but this time she was self-possessed.

She came forward and faced him; prettier than ever, somehow (he thought again), with tossed curls and pinafore blowing all about her. She might have been a little schoolgirl let loose from some class in those gaunt buildings behind her. But she spoke in a more "grown-up" manner, in some way, than he'd ever heard her speak before. Looking up, she said in the soft accent that always brought back to him his boyish holidays in her country, "How do you do, Mr. Dampier? I'm afraid I can't shake hands. Mine are all sticky with dope."

"Oh, are they," he said, and looked away from her (not without effort) to the ginger-haired fellow.

"This," said Gwenna Williams, a little self-consciously at last, "is Mr. Ryan."

Plenty of self-assurance about *him!* He nodded and said in a hail-fellow-well-met sort of voice, "Hullo; you're Dampier, are you? Glad to meet you. You see we're hard at it unpacking your engine here."

Then he looked towards the opening, the road, and the car—borrowed as usual—in which the young aviator had motored down. There was another large package in the body of the car; a box, iron-clamped, with letters stencilled upon it, and sealed. "Something else interesting that you've brought with you?" said this insufferable man called Ryan. "Here, André, fetch that box down——"

"No," interrupted young Dampier curtly. The curtness was only partly for this other chap. That sealed box, for reasons of his own and Colonel Conyers', was not to be hauled about by any mechanic in the place. "You and I'll fetch that in presently for Mrs. Crewe."

"Right. She'll be back at three o'clock," Ryan told him. "She told me to ask you to have a look round the place or do anything you cared to until she came in."

"Oh, thanks," said young Dampier.

At that moment what he would have "cared to do" would have been to get this girl to himself somewhere where he could say to the Little Humbug, "Look here. You aren't interested in machinery. You said so yourself. What are you getting this carroty-headed Ass to talk to you about it for?"

Seeing that this was out of the question he hesitated. . . . He didn't want to go round the shops with this fellow, to whom he'd taken a dislike. On sight. He did that sometimes. On the other hand, he couldn't do what he wanted to do—sit and talk to the Little Thing until the Aeroplane Lady returned. What about saying he'd got to look up someone in the village, and bolting, until three o'clock? No. No fear! Why should this other fellow imagine he could have the whole field to himself for talking to Her?

So the trio, the age-old group that is composed of two young men and a girl, stood there for a moment rather awkwardly.

Finally the Little Thing said, "Well, I've got to go back to my wings," and turned.

Then the fellow Ryan said, "One minute, Miss Gwenna——"

Miss Gwenna! All but her Christian name! And he, Paul Dampier, who'd known her a good deal longer —he'd never called her anything at all, but "*you*"! Miss *Gwenna*, if you please!

What followed was even more of a bit of dashed cheek.

For the fellow turned quickly aside to her and said, "I say, it's Friday afternoon. Supposing I don't see you again to-morrow morning—it's all right, isn't it, about your coming up to town for that matinée with me?"

"Oh, yes, thanks," said the Little Thing brightly. "I asked Mrs. Crewe, and it's all right."

Then the new note crept into her voice; the half-unconsciously-acquired note of coquetry. She said, smiling again at the red-haired Ryan, "I am so looking forward to that."

And, turning again to the Airman, she said with a half-shy, half-airy little smile that, also, he found new in her, "Have you seen *The Cinema Star?* Mr. Ryan is going to take me to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, is he?" said Paul Dampier shortly.

Was he, indeed? *Neck!*

"You do come up to town sometimes from here, then?" added Mr. Dampier to Miss Gwenna Williams, speaking a trifle more distinctly than usual, as he concluded, "I was just going to ask you whether you could manage to come out with *me* to-morrow evening?"

Nobody was more surprised to hear these last words than he himself.

Until that moment he hadn't had the faintest intention of ever asking the girl out anywhere again. Now here he was; he'd done it. The Little Thing had murmured, "Oh——" and was looking—yes, she was looking pleased. The fellow was looking as if he'd been taken aback. Good. He'd probably thought he was going to have her to himself for the evening as well as for the matinée. Dinner at the "Petit Riche"—a music-hall afterwards—travel down home with her. Well, Dampier had put a stopper on that plan. But now that he had asked her, where was he going to take her himself? To another musical comedy? No. Too like the other chap. To one of the Exhibitions? No; not good enough. Anyhow, wherever he took her, he hadn't been out-bidden by this soft-soapy young idiot. Infernal cheek. . . . Then, all in a flash the brilliant solution came to Paul Dampier. Of course! Yes, he could work it! The Aviation Dinner! He'd meant to go. He would take her. It would involve taking Mrs. Crewe as well. Never mind. It was something to which that other young ass wouldn't have the chance of taking her, and that was enough.

"Yes," he went on saying, as coolly as if it had all been planned. "There's a show on at the Wilbur Club; Wilbur Wright, you know. I thought I'd ask if you and Mrs. Crewe would care to come with me to the dinner. Will you?—Just break that packing up a bit more," he added negligently to the red-haired youth. "And check those spaces—Will you take me into your place, Miss Williams?"

That, he thought, was the way to deal with poachers on his particular preserves!

It was only when he got inside the spacious white Wing-room and sat down, riding a chair, close to the trestle-table where the girl bent her curly head so conscientiously over the linen strips again, that he realized that this Little Thing wasn't his particular preserves at all!

Hadn't he, only a couple of weeks ago, definitely decided that she was never to mean anything of the sort to him? Hadn't he resolved——

Here, with his long arms crossed over the back of the chair as he sat facing and watching her, he put back his head and laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" she asked, straightening herself in the big pinafore with its front all stiff with that sticky mess she worked with.

He was laughing to think how dashed silly it was to make these resolutions. Resolutions about which people you were or were not to see anything of! As if Fate didn't arrange that for you! As if you didn't *have* to leave that to Fate, and to take your chance!

Possibly Fate meant that he and the Little Thing should be friends, great friends. Not now, of course. Not yet. In some years' time, perhaps, when his position was assured; when he'd achieved some of the Big Things that he'd got to do; when he *had* got something to offer a girl. Ages to wait. . . . Still, he could leave it at that, now, he thought. . . . It might, or might not, come to anything. Only, it was ripping to see her!

He didn't tell her this.

He uttered some conventional boy's joke about being amused to see her actually at work for the first time since he'd met her. And she made a little bridling of her neck above that vast, gull-like wing that she was pasting; and retorted that, indeed, she worked very hard.

"" Really," he teased her. " Always seem to be taking time off, whenever I've come."

" You've only come twice, Mr. Dampier ; and then it's been sort of lunch-time."

" Oh, I see," he said. (" I may smoke, mayn't I ? " and he lighted a cigarette.) " D'you always take your lunch out of doors, Miss Gwenna ? " (He didn't see why *he* shouldn't call her that.)

She said, " I'd like to." Then she was suddenly afraid he might think she was thinking of their open-air lunch in that field, weeks ago, and she said quickly (still working) : " I—I was so glad when I heard about the engine coming, and that Colonel Conyers had ordered the P.D.Q. to be made here. I—do congratulate you, Mr. Dampier. Tell me about the Machine, won't you ? "

He said, " Oh, you'll hear all about that presently ; but look here, you haven't told me about *you*——"

Gwenna could scarcely believe her ears ; but yes, it was true. He was turning, turning from talk about the Machine, the P.D.Q. the *Fiancée !* Asking, for the first time, about herself. She drew a deep breath ; she turned her bright, greeny-brown eyes sideways, longing at that moment for Leslie with whom to exchange a glance. Her own shyly triumphant look met only the deep, wise eyes of the Great Dane, lying in his corner of the Wing-room beside his kennel. He blinked, thumped his tail upon the floor.

" Darling," whispered Gwenna, a little shakily, as she passed the tawny dog. " *Darling !* " She had to say it to something just then.

Paul Dampier pursued, looking at her over his crossed arms on the back of that chair, " You haven't said whether you'll come to-morrow night."

She asked (as if it mattered to her where she

went, as long as it was with him), "What is this dinner?"

"The Wilbur dinner? Oh, there's one every year. Just a meeting of those interested in flying. I thought you might care——"

"Who'll be there?"

"Oh, just people. Not many. Some ladies go. Why?"

"Only because I haven't got anything at all to wear," announced Gwenna, much more confidently, however, than she could have done before Mr. Ryan had told her so much about her own looks, "except my everlasting white and the blue sash like at the Smiths'."

"Well, that was awfully pretty; wasn't it? Only——"

"What?"

"Well, may I say something?"

"Well, what is it?"

"Frightfully rude, really," said Paul Dampier, tilting himself back on his chair, and still looking at her over a puff of smoke, staring even. She was something to stare at. Why was she such a lot prettier? Had he *forgotten* what her looks were? She seemed—she seemed, to-day, so much more of a woman than he'd ever seen her. He forgot that he was going to say something. She, with a little fluttering laugh for which he could have clasped her, reminded him.

"What's the rude thing you were going to say to me?"

"Oh! It's only this. Don't go muffling your neck up in that sort of ruff affair this time; looks ever so much nicer without," said the boy.

The girl retorted with quite a good show of disdainfulness, "I don't think there's anything *quite* so funny as men talking about what we wear."

"Oh, all right," said the boy, and pretended to be offended. Then he laughed again and said, "I've still got something of yours that you wear, as a matter of fact——"

"Of mine?"

"Yes, I have; I've never given it you back yet. That locket of yours that you lost."

"Oh——!" she exclaimed.

That locket! That little heart-shaped pendant of mother-o'-pearl that she had worn the first evening that she'd ever seen him; and that she had dropped in the car as they were driving back. So much had happened . . . she felt she was not even the same Gwenna as the girl who had snapped the slender silver chain about her neck before they set out for the party. . . . She'd given up wondering if her Airman had forgotten to give it back to her. She'd forgotten all about it herself. And he'd had it, one of her own personal belongings, somewhere in his keeping all this time.

"Oh, yes; my—my little mascot," she said. "Have you got it?"

"Not here. It's in my other jac—it's at my rooms, I'll bring it to the dinner for you. And—er—look here, Miss Gwenna——"

He tilted forward again as the girl passed his side of the table to reach for the little wooden pattern by which she cut out a patch for the end of the strip, and then passed back again.

"I say," he began again, a trifle awkwardly, "if you don't mind, I want you to give me something in exchange for that locket."

"Oh, do you?" murmured Gwenna. "What?"

And a chill took her.

She didn't want him, here and now, to ask for—what Mr. Ryan might have asked.

But it was not a kiss he asked for, after all.

He said, " You know those little white wings you put in your shoes ? You remember, the night of that river dance ? Well, I wish you'd let me have one of those to keep as my mascot."

He hadn't thought of wishing it until there had intruded into his ken that other young man who made appointments—and who might have the—cheek to ask for keepsakes, but who shouldn't be first, after all !

Anxiously, as if it were for much more than that feathered trifle of a mascot that he asked, he said, " Will you ? "

" Oh ! If you like ! "

" Sure you don't mind ? "

" Mind ? I should like you to have it," said Gwenna softly. " Really."

And across the great white aeroplane wing the girl looked very sweetly and soberly at her Aviator, who had just asked that other tiny wing of her, as a knight begged his lady's favour.

* * * * * *

It was at this moment that the Aeroplane Lady, an alert figure in dark blue, came into a room where a young man and a girl had been talking idly enough together while one smoked and the other went on working with that five-foot barrier of the wing between them.

The Aeroplane Lady, being a woman, was sensitive to atmosphere—not the spirit-and-solution-scented atmosphere of this place of which she was mistress, but another.

In it she caught a vibration of something that made her

say to herself, " Bless me, what's *this?* I never knew those two had even met! ' Not saying so,' I suppose. But certainly engaged, or on the verge of it! "

—Which all went to prove that the rebuked, the absent Leslie, was not far wrong in saying that it is the Obvious Thing that always succeeds!

CHAPTER XIX

THE SEALED BOX

WHATEVER the Aeroplane Lady thought to herself about the two in the Wing-room, there was no trace of it in her brisk greeting to Paul Dampier.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long?" she said. "I'm ready now."

Then she turned to her girl-assistant, who was once more laying the tacky strips of linen along the seams. "That's right," she said. "You can go straight on with that wing; that will take you some time. One of the wings for *your* machine," she added to the aviator. "I'm ready, Mr. Dampier."

She and the young man left the Wing-room together and entered the adjoining office, closing the door behind them.

Left alone, Gwenna went on swiftly working, and as swiftly dreaming. Rapidly, but none the less surely, seam after long seam was covered; and the busyness of her fingers seemed to help the fancies of her brain.

"One of the wings for *his* Machine!" she thought. "And there was I, thinking I should mind working for that—for 'Her,'" she smiled. "I don't, after all. I needn't care, now."

Her heart seemed singing within her. Nothing had

happened, really. Only, she was sure of her lover. That was all. All! She worked; and her small feet on the floor seemed set on air, as in that flying dream.

"Such a great, huge wing for 'Her,'" she murmured to herself. "Such a little, little wing for himself that he asked for. My tiny one that I put in my shoe. It was for him I put it there! And now it's begun to bring him to me. It *has!*" she exulted. "He's begun to care. I *know* he does."

From the other side of the door came a heightened murmur of voices in the office. Something heavy seemed to be set down on the floor. That sealed box, perhaps, that he'd brought with him in the car. Then came the shutting of the outer door. Mr. Ryan passed the window. Then a sound of hammering in the office, and the long squeak of a nail being prized out of wood. They were opening that mysterious package of his. Gwenna's fingers flew over her own task to the tune of her joyous thoughts.

"I don't care how long it lasts before *anything* else happens. Don't care how this flying-machine of his does try to keep him from me. She won't. She can't. Nothing can!" triumphed the girl, smoothing the canvas that was her Rival's plumage. "He's going to be mine, with everything that he knows. So much better, and cleverer, and belonging to different sort of people as he is, and yet he's going to have *me* belonging to him. She's had the last of him putting her always first!"

She heard in the office Paul Dampier's short laugh and his "Oh? you think so?" to the Aeroplane Lady. Gwenna scarcely wondered what this might be about. Some business to do with the Machine; but he would come to an end of that, soon. He'd come back to her, with that look in his blue eyes, that tone in his deep

voice. She could wait patiently now for the day, whenever it came, when he should tell her definitely that he loved her and wanted her to be his. There would be that, of course—Gwenna, the inexperienced, still saw "the proposal" as the scene set and prepared; the inevitable milestone beside the course of true love. Never mind that now, though. It didn't matter when. What mattered was that it *would* come. Then she would always be with him. It would be for ever, like that blissful day in the hayfield, that summer night by the river at the dance, those few bewildering seconds on the Westminster scaffolding. And with no cruelty of separation afterwards to spoil it. Nothing—nothing was going to part them, after all.

* * * * * *

She had finished the wing. She looked about for the next thing to do.

There were three wings in the room, and all were finished. A fourth wing still lay, a skeleton of fretted and glued wood, in the workshops; the skin was not yet stretched over it.

And there were no more letters to write for the firm.

Gwenna had nothing to do.

"I shall *have* to go into the office and ask," she said, admitting to herself that she was glad enough to go. So often she had painted for herself, out of mere memories, the picture of her Airman. He was now in the office, in the flesh! She need not have to satisfy herself with pictures of him. She slipped off her sticky pinafore; the white muslin blouse beneath it was fresh and pretty enough. She moved to the office-door. It was her room; she had never yet had to knock at that door.

She pushed it open and stood waiting. For a moment

she only saw the Aeroplane Lady and the tall Aviator. They had their backs to her; they were standing side by side and examining a plan that they had pinned up on the matchboarding wall. Paul Dampier's finger was tracing a little arc on the plan, and he was slowly shaking his head, with the gesture of a man who says that something "won't do." The Aeroplane Lady's fingers were meditatively at her lips, and her attitude echoed that of the young man. Something that they had planned wouldn't do——

Then Gwenna's eyes fell, from these two people, to that "*Something.*" It was something that she had never seen about the Aircraft Works before. Indeed, she did not remember having seen it ever before, anywhere, except in pictures. This object was on the floor, half in and half out of the sealed wooden box that Paul Dampier had brought down with him in the car, and that he wouldn't let the workman handle. . . . So this was why. . . .

This was it. Aghast, she stared at it.

It was a long, khaki-painted cylinder, and from one end of it a wicked-looking little nozzle projected for an inch or so. The other end, which disappeared into the box, showed a peep of a magazine and a pistol-grip.

Even to Gwenna's unskilled eyes the *thing* appeared instantly what it was.

A machine-gun.

"A gun?" she thought stupefied; "dear me—on an aeroplane?"

"No," said Paul Dampier's voice suddenly, decisively, speaking to the Aeroplane Lady, "it'll have to be a rifle after all."

And with the sudden breaking of his voice upon her ear, there seemed to be torn from before the girl's eyes a corner of some veil.

Quite suddenly (how, she could not explain) she knew what all this meant.

That plan for that new flying-machine. That gun. The whole object of the ambitions of these people with their so romantic profession. Scraps of her Aviator's talk about "scouting," and "the new Arm," and "modern warfare." . . .

Just now she had been swept up aloft by his look and tone into the seventh heaven of a woman's delight. That was Love. Here, epitomized in that cylinder with that vicious little nozzle, she saw the Power that could take him from her yet. This was War!

A shudder ran over her.

Her mind took no notice of the facts that there was no War for him to go to, that this grim preparation must be for experimenting only, for manœuvres, sham fights; that this was July, Nineteen-fourteen, an era of sleepy peace (except for that gossip, half a joke, that we might have civil war in Ireland yet), and that she and he and everybody they had to do with lived in the Twentieth Century, in England. . . .

Perhaps it was because she was not English, but British, Welsh. She entirely lacked that Anglo-Saxon "balance" of which the English are so proud, and that stolidity and that unimaginativeness. Her imagination caught some of those unheard, unsuspected messages with which the air must have been vibrant, all those midsummer weeks.

Her quick, unbalanced Celtic fancy had already shown her as clearly as if she had seen it with her eyes that image of his Aeroplane as a winged and taloned Woman-rival. Now it flashed before her, in a twink, another picture:

Paul Dampier, seated in that Aeroplane, swooping through the air, *armed and in danger!*

The danger was from below. She did not see that danger. She saw only the image, against grey, scudding clouds, of the Beloved. But she could feel it, that poignant Threat to him, to him in every second of his flight. It was not the mere risk of accident or falling. It was a new peril of which the shadow, cast before, fell upon the receptive fancy of the girl who loved the adventurer. And, set to that shadow-picture in her mind, there rang out to some inner sense of hers a Voice that sounded clear and ominous words.

They called to her: "*Fired at both by friend and foe——*"

Then stopped.

The young girl didn't remember ever to have heard or even to have read these words. How should she? It was the warning fore-echo of a phrase now historic, but then as yet unuttered, that had transmitted itself to some heightened sense of hers:

"*Fired at both by friend and foe!*"

There! It was gone, the waking vision that left her trembling, with a certainty.

Yes; here was the meaning of the sealed box, of the long confabulation of her Airman with the Aeroplane Lady. . . . War was coming. And *they knew.*

Gwenna, standing there in the doorway, drawing a long breath and feeling suddenly rather giddy, knew that she had come upon something that she had not been meant to guess.

What was she to do about it?

Her hand was on the knob of the door.

Must she close it upon herself, or behind her?

Should she come forward and cry, "Oh, if it was a dreadful secret, why didn't you lock the door?"

Or should she go out noiselessly, taking that burden

of a secret with her? She might confess to the Aeroplane Lady afterwards. . . .

Here she saw that the Airman had half turned. His boyish, determined profile was dark in shadow against the plan on the wall; the plan of the P.D.Q. Sunlight through the office window touched and gilded the edge of his blonde head.

"Yes; I thought so. Have to be a rifle after all," he repeated in a matter-of-fact tone. Then, turning more round, his glance met the startled eyes of the girl in the doorway.

And that finished the dilemma for Gwenna.

Something rose up in her and was too strong to let her be silent.

"Oh! I've *seen* it!" she cried sharply. "*Paul!*"

He took one stride towards her and slipped his arm about her as she swayed. She was white to the lips.

"Is there any water——" began young Dampier, but already the Aeroplane Lady had poured out a glassful.

It was he, however, who put it to Gwenna's lips, holding her still.

"It's all *right*, darling," he said reassuringly (and the give-away word slipped very easily from his tongue). "Better, aren't you? Frightfully muggy in that room with those radiators! You oughtn't to be——Here!" He took some of the cold water and dabbed it on her curls.

"I suppose he knew he could trust the child," thought the Aeroplane Lady as she closed the door of the Wing-room between herself and those two in the office, "but I don't know that I should have engaged her if I'd known. I don't want lovers about the place, here. Of course, this explains his Aviation dinner and everything——"

* * * * * *

Little Gwenna, standing with her small face buried against the Aviator's tweed jacket, was sighing out that she hadn't *meant* to come in, hadn't *meant* to look at that horrible gun. . . .

The girl didn't know what she was saying. The boy scarcely heard it. He was rumpling with his cheek the short, silky curls he had always longed to touch. Presently he tilted her cherub's head back against his shoulder, then put both his hands about that throat of hers.

She gave an unsteady little laugh.

"You'll throttle me," she murmured.

Without loosening his clasp, he bent his fair head further down, and kissed her, very gently, on the mouth.

"Don't mind, do you?" he said, into another kiss. "*Do* you?"

At that moment the Little Thing in his arms had banished all thought of those Big Things from his mind.

PART II

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, 1914

CHAPTER I

THE AVIATION DINNER

GWENNA began to feel a little nervous and intimidated, even in the car that took herself and the Aeroplane Lady and the Airman to the Aviation dinner.

A hundred yards before they reached the portals of the Club in Pall Mall that car stopped. Then it began to advance again a yard or two at a time. A long row of other cars and taxis was ahead, and from them alighted guests in dull black opera hats, with mufflers; once or twice there was the light and jewelled gleam of a woman's wrap, but they were mostly men who were driving up.

"Colonel Conyers," said Paul Dampier to the attendant in the great marble-tiled entrance.

Then he was shown off to the right; Gwenna and the Aeroplane Lady to the dressing-rooms on the left. Before an immense glass they removed their wraps and came out to the waiting-room, the girl all misty-white with the sky-blue sash and the dancing-shoes; the Lady gowned in grey satin that had just the gleam of aluminium in that factory of hers, and with her brooch of the winged serpents fastened at her breast.

They sat down at one of the little polished tables in the waiting-room under the long windows on to Pall Mall; it was a high, light-panelled room, with a frieze

of giant roses. A couple of ladies went by to the dressing-room, greeting Mrs. Crewe as they passed.

Then there stopped to speak to her a third and older and very handsome lady all in black, with diamonds ablaze in her laces and in her grey, piled-up hair.

"There should be some good speeches to-night, shouldn't there?" said this lady. "All these splendid men! . . . You know, my dear, take us for all in all" —and she gave a little laugh—"we *are* splendid!"

"But there are so few of us," said the Aeroplane Lady, ruefully.

The other woman, about to pass on, stopped for a moment again, and looking over her white shoulder said, very seriously something that both her hearers were to remember. "If England is ever to be saved, it will be by a few."

She went out; and Mrs. Crewe said to Gwenna, "That was Lady——" (Something) "the wife of the man who's as responsible as most people for the security of this Empire——"

Most of the people there seemed to know the Aeroplane Lady quite well, Gwenna noticed, when Paul Dampier came up and took them out into the Central Hall again, where the guests were assembling. The place seemed as high as a cathedral, with a marble floor, and alcoves, and tall, classic, brass tripod things to hold the end of men's cigarettes and ashes. The Aeroplane Lady was at once surrounded by a group of men. Gwenna, feeling very shy and little and of no account, turned to her Airman.

"You said," she murmured reproachfully, "that there *weren't* going to be a lot of grand people."

"These aren't 'grand,' bless you! People aren't, who are really—well, who 'do things,' as you say. Not nearly as frilly here as at the Smiths, that other dinner,"

he said, smiling down at her. "I'm going to bring up Colonel Conyers and introduce him to you——"

"*Him?* Good *gracious!*" thought the little Welsh girl in consternation to herself. "Colonel Conyers!—oh, no, please—I should be much too frightened——"

But the tall figure had detached itself from a group at a word from Paul Dampier, and Colonel Conyers came up. Gwenna recognized the lean, smiling, half-mischievous face of the soldier who—those ages ago!—had talked to those ladies in the motor-car at Hendon. This was the man they called "Aircraft Conyers," the man practically at the head of Aeronautics, Paul had said, the man in whose hands rested (among so many, many other things) the whole career of the inventor of the P.D.Q.! Gwenna, with her curly head whirling, felt inclined to drop a schoolchild's curtsy to this Great One of the Councils of the Earth.

He took her hand into his own long, lean one.

"How d'you do?" he drawled, smiling cheerfully. "Starving, what? I am, I can tell you. Always late here. Won't be long, now. You're at my table, I believe." Then, almost anxiously, "Fond of chocolates? You are? Good. Then I can collect the lot of those little silver dishes around us and pretend it's all for you. It's for me, really."

Gwenna, who was not able to help laughing at this unexpectedness on the part of the great Aircraft Conyers, said: "Are *you* fond of them?"

"Passionately. Passionately!" said Colonel Conyers with a nod, as he turned to find his own dinner-partner.

"Didn't frighten you much, did he?" laughed Paul Dampier to the Little Thing at his side. "Course he didn't. I'll tell you who most of the others are when we get into the supper-room."

In the great supper-room with its painted ceiling and

gilded pillars dinner was laid on a number of small tables for parties of six or eight. Gwenna found herself the only woman at their table, the Aeroplane Lady sitting far down at the other end of the room.

All dazed, the young girl looked about her like a stray bird that has fluttered in through an open window. Beside her, Paul Dampier pointed out to her this celebrity and that at the tables.

"Colonel Conyers you've seen. . . ." (That personage had nodded to the young girl over a stack of pink roses and had made a little movement to show the basket of sweets beside his plate.) "Now that man with the Order, that's Lord" (So-and-So), "Director of Coast Defence. And that," (So-and-So), "Chief Engineer. And that little man one down—in the opposite direction from where I'm looking—that's" (So-and-So), "editor of *The Air*. Wonderful chap; brains enough to sink a ship."

An extraordinary mixture of men, Gwenna thought, as her glance followed his direction, and he went on talking. Soldiers, sailors, chemists, scientists, ministers; all banded together. Ranks and fortunes were merged. Here were men of position, men of brains, men of money. Men whose names were in all the newspapers, and men the papers had never heard of, all with one aim and object, the furtherance of Civilization's newest advance: the Conquest of the Air.

The dinner proceeded. Pale amber wine whispered and bubbled in her glass, dishes came and went, but the girl scarcely knew what she ate or drank. She was in a new world, and *he* had brought her there. She felt it so intensely that presently it almost numbed her. She was long past the stage of excitement that manifests itself in gasps and exclamations. She could speak ordinarily and calmly when Paul Dampier, turning

from his talk to a Physical Laboratory man in a very badly brushed coat, asked her: "Well? Find it interesting?"

"You know I do," she said, with a grave little glance.

He said, smiling, "What did you say to the red-haired youth about not going to the matinée with him first?"

"Mr. Ryan? Oh! I just told him I hadn't got over my headache from the smell of dope, and that I was afraid it would tire me too much to do both."

"Pretty annoyed, I expect, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was," replied Gwenna, with the absolute callousness of a woman in love towards the feelings of any but the one man. She did not even trouble whether it had been the feelings or the vanity of Mr. Peter Ryan that had been hurt. What mattered was that Paul Dampier had not wished her to go to that matinée.

Paul Dampier said, "Well, I cried off an engagement to-night, too. Colonel Conyers wanted to take me back with him. But I'm seeing you home."

"Oh, but you mustn't; you needn't!" she protested happily. "I'm not going down to the Works, you know, to-night. I'm sleeping at the Club. I'm staying this week-end with Leslie."

"With Leslie, are you? M'm. But I'm taking you up to the Club afterwards," he persisted. "A fellow's got to look after"—here he laughed a little as if it were a joke that pleased him—"a fellow's got to look after his *fiancée*, hasn't he?"

She was a little subdued. She thought for the moment that he had put Colonel Conyers off, not for her, after all! but for that Machine of his. Then she thought: No!—the machine was second now. She said, half in hope, half in dread, "D'you mean the P.D.Q.?"

He turned, with his mouth full of salad, staring whimsically at her.

"The P.D.Q.? What you thinking of? I meant *you*."

"*Me?*" She gave a little gasp.

Life and happiness were too much for her again. She felt as if that whispering untouched champagne in her glass had gone to her head. Was it really true —*that*, that he had said?

"Well, aren't you?" he said gaily, but dropping his voice a little as the conversation rose about them. "Aren't you that to me? Engaged, aren't we?"

"Oh, I don't know," the young girl said, breathlessly. It was as if the moon that one had cried for had suddenly dropped, to lie like a round, silver mirror in one's lap. "Did you mean *that*, yesterday afternoon?"

"Didn't I mean it before that?" he said, half to himself. "What about all those dances? that time when Hugo dragged me off to that place by the river? Those would have been *most* incorrect," he teased her, "if we hadn't been. We shall have to be, my dear."

Then an impulse took her. (It is known to any young girl who is sincerely in Love.)

"No. Don't let's——" she said suddenly. "Don't let's be 'engaged!'"

For it seemed to her that a winged Dream was just about to alight and to become a clumsy creature of Earth—like that Aeroplane on the Flying Ground. The boy said, staring at her, "*Not* be engaged? Why on earth? How d'you mean?"

"I mean, everybody gets '*engaged*,'" she explained very softly and rapidly over the bread that she was crumbling in her little fingers. "And it's such a sort of *fuss*, with writing home, and congratulations, and how-long-has-this-been-going-on, and all that sort of thing! People at tea-parties and things *talking* about

us! I *know* they would!" declared the Welsh girl with distaste, "and saying 'Dear me, she looks very young' and *wondering* about us! Oh, no, *don't* let's have it! It would seem to *spoil* it, for me! Don't let's *call* it anything, need we? Don't let's say anything yet, except to—just US."

"All right," said the boy with an easy shrug. (He was too young to know what he was escaping.) "Sure I don't mind, as long as you're just with me, all the time we can."

She said, wonderfully sedate above the tumult in her heart, "Did you bring my locket with you to-night?"

"No. I didn't. D'you know why? Can't you guess? Because I wanted to give it back to you when *I* could put it round my Girl's neck," he told her. And she turned away from him, so happily confused again that she could not speak.

She was his Girl; his. And because he was one of this band of brothers, sitting here feasting and talking, each making it his business to contribute his share to the sum of what was to be one of the World's greatest Forces, why! because of that, even she, little Gwenna Williams, could feel herself to be a tiny part of that Force. She was an Aviator's girl—even if it were a wonderful secret that nobody knew, so far, but he and she.

(Already everybody at that table and many others in the room had remarked what a pretty little creature young Dampier's sweetheart was.)

* * * * * *

"*The King!*" announced the President of the Dinner.

There was a movement and a rustle all round the great supper-room as the guests rose to the toast;

another rustle as they reseated themselves. One of the celebrities whom Paul had pointed out to her began to speak upon the achievements of Wilbur Wright. At the table next to Gwenna some journalists bent absorbed over scribbling pads. Speech followed speech as the toasts were gone through. The opal-blue haze of cigarette smoke drifted up above the white tables with their rose-pink and ferny decorations. Chairs were pushed sidewards as guests turned alert and listening faces towards the head of the room; and every now and again the grave and concise and pleasantly modulated tones of some speaker-on-the-subject of his heart were broken in upon by a soft storm of applause.

"Colonel Conyers to speak now," murmured Paul to Gwenna, as the long, lean figure that had been sitting opposite to them rose. He stepped backwards, to stand against one of those gilded pillars as he made his speech, responding to the toast that had coupled his name with that of the Flying Wing of the Army.

Gwenna listened with even more breathless attention than she had paid to the other speakers.

Colonel Conyers spoke easily and lightly, as if he had been, not making a speech, but talking to a knot of friends at his house. He reviewed, in terms so simple that even the young girl at his table could follow all he said, the difficulties and the risks of aviation, and the steps that had been taken to minimize those risks. Wind, it seemed, had been in a great measure overcome. Risk from faulty workmanship of machines —that, too, was overcome. Workmanship was now well-nigh as perfect as it could be made.

Here Gwenna glowed with pride, exchanging a glance with her employer far down the tables. This meant *their* workmanship at Aircraft Factories; their

Factory, too! This meant the labours of Mrs. Crewe and of Mr. Ryan, and of André, and of the workmen in overalls at the lathes in that noisy central shop. Even the brushful of dope that she, Gwenna, spread conscientiously over each seam of the great wings, played its tiny part in helping to preserve a Flyer's life!

The risk in stability, too, Colonel Conyers said, had been successfully combated by the gyroscope. There remained, however, Fog and Darkness as the chief perils which, at the present moment, of July, Nineteen-fourteen, our Airmen had to fight. . . .

In the soldier's lean face that shrewd, half-mischievous smile was flickering as he spoke; his grey trim head turning now and again against the gilded column, his keen eyes fixed upon some objective of his own, his strong hand fidgeting in the small mechanical gesture of a man who is less accustomed to speaking about things than to doing them.

Gwenna thought how different, how entirely different were all these people here from that other dinner-party at the house of the prosperous and artistic Smiths who had found so much to say about the Russian Ballet!

Definitely now Gwenna saw what the chief difference between them was.

Those other people treated and spoke of a pastime as though it were a matter of Life and Death. These people here made Life and Death matters their pastime.

"And these splendid real people are the ones I'm going to belong to," the girl told herself with a glance at the tall boy beside her who had decided her fate. That thought was to glow in the very depths of her, like a firefly nestling at the heart of a rose, for as long as she lived.

The even, pleasant tones of Colonel Conyers went

on to give as one of the most hopeful features of aviation the readiness of the quite young man of the present day to volunteer. No sooner was a fatality announced than for one airman who, cheerfully giving his life for the service of his country, had been put out of action, half a dozen promising young fellows were eager to come forward and take his place.

"Two of 'em again yesterday. . . . Two of his lieutenants, killed in Yorkshire," whispered Paul Dampier, leaning to Gwenna.

She missed the next sentence of Colonel Conyers, which concluded cheerily enough with the hard-worked but heartening reminder that whom the Gods love die young. . . .

Then, with a broadening of that humorous smile and with a glint in his eyes, he referred to "those other people (plump and well-to-do—and quite young people) who do, still, really appear to consider that the whole of a man's duty to his country is to preserve his health for as long as possible and then, having reached a ripe old age, to die comfortably and respectably in his bed!——"

There was a short ripple of laughter about the room; but after this Gwenna heard very little.

Not only was she incapable of taking any more in, but this last sentence pulled her up with a sudden memory of what she had seen, yesterday.

That gun at the Aircraft Works. That pictured presentiment in her own mind.

And she heard again, through Colonel Conyers' pleasant voice, the queer, unexplained words that had haunted her:

"*Fired at by both friend and foe.*"

She thought, "I must ask! I must say something to Paul about that——"

CHAPTER II

THE WHISPER OF WAR

SHE said it after the dinner had broken up.

In the great hall young Dampier had turned to the Aeroplane Lady with his offer of motoring her to her Hotel first. She had good-naturedly laughed at him and said, " No. I'm going to be driven back by the rightful owner of the car this time. You take Miss Williams."

And then she had gone off with some friend of Paul's who had motors to lend, and Paul had taken Gwenna to find a taxi to drive up to Hampstead.

They drove slowly through Piccadilly Circus, now brighter than at midday. It was thronged with the theatre-crowds that surged towards the crossings. Coloured restaurant-coats and jewelled head-gear and laughing faces were gay in the lights that made that broad blazing belt about the fountain. Higher up the whole air was a soft haze of gold, melting into the hot, star-strewn purple of the night-sky. And against this there tapered, black and slender, the apex of the fountain, the downward-swooping shape that is not Mercury, but the flying Love—the Lad with Wings.

Paul Dampier leant back in the closed cab and would have drawn the girl to him.

She put both hands on his broad chest to hold him a little away from her.

"I want to ask you something," she began a little tremulously. "It's just—Is there going to be——"

"Well, what?" he asked, smiling close to her.

Of all things that he least expected came what the girl had to say.

"Is there going to be—a War, Paul?"

"A *what?*" he asked, thinking he had not heard aright.

She repeated it, tremulously. "A war. Real war."

"War?" he echoed, blankly, taken aback. He was silent from puzzled astonishment over her asking this, as they turned up Shaftesbury Avenue. They were held up outside the Hippodrome for some minutes. He was still silent. The taxi gave a jerk and went on. And she still waited for his reply. She had to remind him.

"Well," she said again, tremulous. "*Is* there going to be?"

"A war? A *war* indeed," he said again. "What an extraordinary—Who's—What put such a thing into your head?"

She said, "*Is* there?"

The boy gave a half-amazed, half-uneasy laugh. He retorted, "What d'you mean, Gwenna? A war *where?*"

She said flutteringly, "Anywhere."

"Oh," he said, and laughed as if relieved. "Always some war, somewhere. Frontier shows in India, and so on. There is some scrapping going on in Europe too, now, you know. Looks as if Austria and Servia were going to have a set-to. You mean that."

"No, I don't," persisted the Welsh girl, to whom these places seemed indescribably remote and beside the mark. "I mean . . . a war to do with *us*, like."

"Us——?"

"To do with England."

"But——" he said, frowning. "Why, how absurd! A war with England? Why . . . of course not. Why should you think of it?"

She cleared her throat and answered with another tremulous question.

"Why should you have—that gun-thing—on your aeroplane?"

"Not going to. Not on the P.D.Q.," he said, shaking his head. "Only an experiment, anyhow."

"Why should you have 'experiments' with those things?" she faltered. "'*Have to be a rifle,*' you said. Why should you talk about 'scouting' and 'modern warfare'?"

"I wasn't!" he said quite hotly.

"Yes, you were. That day we were together. That day in the field when you were talking to me about the Machine."

"Oh, *then!* Weeks ago."

"Yes. Why should there *be* all that, unless you meant that there'd be a war, with England in it. *Paul!*" she cried, almost accusingly, "you said yourself that it was '*bound to come!*'"

"Oh, well! Everybody said *that,*" he assured her lightly. "Can't help seeing Germany and that Fleet of hers, and her Zeppelins and things, going on build, build, build. They don't do that for their health, you bet! Scrap's bound to come; yes. Sooner or later."

"Yes, Paul; but *when?*"

"How should I know, my *dear* child?" retorted the young Airman. "Why didn't you ask Lord Thingummy, or Conyers at the Club just now?" he laughed. "Good speech of his, wasn't it?"

"Does *he* know?" persisted Gwenna, paling. "About the war coming, I mean?"

"More likely to know than I am, those people. Not that they'd give it away if they did. It won't be to-morrow, anyway. To-morrow; that's Sunday. *Our* holiday. Another day we shall have all to ourselves. Tell me what time I'm to call for you at the Club."

Not to be put off, she retorted, timid, persistent, "Tell me when *you* think it would come. Soon?"

Half laughing, half impatient, he said, "I *don't* know. Soon enough for it to be in my time, I hope."

"But—" she said, with a little catch in her voice, "you're not a soldier?"

He said quietly, "I'm an aviator."

An aviator; yes. That was what she meant. He belonged to the most daring and romantic of professions; the most dangerous, but not *that* danger? An inventor, part of his time; the rest of his time an airman at Hendon who made flights above what the man with the megaphone called the "Aer-rio-drome" above the khaki-green ground with the pylons and the border of summer-frocked spectators. *Her* boy! An aviator. . . . Would that mean presently a man flying above enemy country, to shoot and be shot at? ("*Fired at by both friend and foe.*") She said quiveringly: "*You* wouldn't have to fight?"

He said: "Hope so, I'm sure."

"Oh, Paul!" she cried, aghast, her hands on his arm. "Just when—when I've only just *got* you! To lose you again so soon——! Oh, no——!"

"Oh, I say, darling, don't be so silly," he said briskly and reassuringly. He patted the little hands. "We're not going to talk about this sort of thing, d'you hear? There's nothing to talk *about*. Actually, there's nothing. Understand?"

"Yes," she murmured slowly. She thought,

"Actually, 'there's nothing to talk about' in what's between him and me. *But it's there all the time.*"

And then, gradually, that presentiment of War began to fade in the reality of her joy at being with him now, with him still. . . .

They turned up the Hampstead Road, flaring with naphtha-lights above the stalls, noisy with shouts of costers, crowded with the humble shoppers of Saturday night.

"Well, and what about to-morrow?" Dampier took up.

"I *was* going with Leslie to——"

"So you said. With Leslie, indeed! D'you think you're going to be allowed to go anywhere again, except with *me?*" he muttered as he put his arms about her.

He held her as close as he had done on the scaffolding, that afternoon when he had arranged with himself never to see the Little Thing again; close as he'd done next time he did see her, at the Factory.

"Oh, *you* don't know!" he said quite resentfully (while she laughed softly and happily in his hold), "you *don't* know how I've wanted you with me. I—*I* haven't been able to think of anything—You *have* got a fellow fond of you in a jolly short time, haven't you? How've you done it? M'm? I—Here!" he broke off savagely, "what *is* this dashed idiot stopping the taxi for?"

"Because I get out here. It's the Club," Gwenna explained to him gravely, opening the door of the cab for herself. "Good-night."

"What? No, you don't," protested the boy. "We're going up the Spaniards Road and down by the Whitestone Pond, and round by Hendon first. I must take you for a drive. It's not so late. Hang it, I haven't *seen* you to speak to——"

But she had made a dash out and across the lamp-lighted asphalt, and now she nodded to him from the top step of the house, with her key already clicking in the lock.

"There," she thought.

For even in the tie that binds the most adoring heart there is twisted some little gay strand of retaliation.

Let *him* feel that after a whole evening of sitting in her pocket he hadn't seen anything of her. She'd known that sort of feeling long enough. Let *him* take his turn; let *him* have just a taste of it!

"Good-night!" she called softly to her lover before she disappeared. "See you to-morrow!"

CHAPTER III

THE LAST SUNDAY OF PEACE

NEVER had Gwenna risen so early after having spent so little of a night in sleep!

Into the small hours she had crouched in her kimono on the edge of Leslie's camp bedstead in the light that came from the street lamp outside the window; and she had talked and talked and talked.

For by "not saying anything about it" she had never meant keeping her happiness from that close chum.

Miss Long, sincerely delighted, had listened and had nodded her wise black head from the pillow. She had thrown in the confidante's running comments of "There! What did Leslie tell you? . . . Oh, he would, of course. . . . Good. . . . Oh, my dear, *how* exactly like them all. . . . No, no; I didn't mean that. (Of course there's nobody like *him*); I meant 'Fancy!' . . . Yes and then what did Paul say, Virginia?" At last repetitions had cropped up again and again into the softly chattered recital, with all its girlish italics of: "Oh, but you *don't* know what he's like; oh, Leslie, no, you *can't* imagine!"—At last Leslie had sighed, a trifle enviously. And little Gwenna, pattering to the head of the bed, had put her cheek to the other girl's and had whispered earnestly: "Oh, Leslie, if

I only could, d'you know what I'd do? I'd arrange so that he had a twin-brother *exactly* like him, to fall in love with *you!*"

"Taffy! you are too . . . *sweet,*" the elder girl had whispered back in a stifled voice.

Gwenna never guessed how Leslie Long had had much ado not to giggle aloud over that idea. To think of her, Leslie, finding rapture with anyone of the type of the Dampier boy. . . .

A twin-brother of *his?* Another equally bread-and-buttery blonde infant—an infant-in-arms who was even "simpler" than Monty Scott? Oh, Ishtar! . . . For thus does one woman count as profoundest boredom what brings to her sister Ecstasy itself.

And now here was Gwenna, all in white, coming down to the Club's Sunday breakfast with her broad hat already on her head and her gloves and her vanity-bag in her hand.

At the head of the table sat the Vicar's widow with the gold curb brooch and the look of resigned disapproval. Over the table Miss Armitage and the other suffrage-workers were discussing the Cat-and-Mouse Act. Opposite to them one of the art-students, with her hair cut à la Trilby, was listening bewildered, ready to be convinced. . . . Not one of the usual things remained unsaid. . . .

Presently Gwenna's neighbour and *bête noire,* Miss Armitage, was denouncing the few remaining members of her sex who still seemed to acquiesce in the Oriental attitude towards Woman; who still remained serfs or chattels or toys.

"However! *Thy* needn't think thy *caount,*" declared the lecturer firmly, stretching without apology across her neighbour to get the salt. With some

distaste Gwenna regarded her. She had spots on her face. "Pleasers of Men!" she pursued, with noble scorn. "The remnant of the Slyve-girl Type, now happily extinct——"

"Loud cheers," from Leslie Long.

"The serpent's tile," continued the suffragette, "the serpent's tile that, after the reptile has been beaten to death, still gows on feebly wriggling——"

"Better wriggle off now, Taffy, my child," murmured Leslie, who sat facing the breakfast-room window. "Here's a degraded Oriental coming up the path now to call for his serf."

"*You* come," said Gwenna, warmly flushed as she rose. And she held her chum's long arm, dragging her with her as she came into the hall where the tall, typically English figure of her Airman stood, his straw hat in his hand. A splash of scarlet from the stained glass of the hall door fell upon his fair head and across his cheek as he turned.

"Good-morning," said Gwenna sedately, and without giving him so much as a glance. She felt at that moment that she would rather keep him at arm's length for ever than allow him even to hold her hand, with Leslie there. For it takes those who are cooler in temperament than was the little Welsh girl, or those who care less for their lovers than she did, to show themselves warmer in the presence of others.

"Hullo," said Paul Dampier to her. Then, "Hullo, Miss Long! How d'you do?"

Leslie gave him a very hearty shake of the hand, a more friendly glance and a still more demure inquiry about that Machine of his.

Paul Dampier laughed, returning her glance.

She was a sport, he thought. She could be trusted not to claim, just yet, the bet she'd won from his cousin;

the laughing wager about the Aeroplane versus the Girl. Fifteen to one on the Girl, wasn't it? And here was the Girl home in his heart now, with the whole of a gorgeous July Sunday before them for their first holiday together.

"I say, I'm not too early now, am I?" he asked as he and the girl walked down the Club steps together. "I was the first time, so I just went for a walk round the cricket-pitch and back. Sickening thing I couldn't rake up a car anywhere for to-day. Put up with trains or tubes and taxis instead, I'm afraid. D'you mind? Where shall we go?"

* * * * * *

"Flying, of course," was Gwenna's first thought. "Now at last he'll take me up." But that would be for the afternoon.

For the morning they wanted country, and grass, and trees to sit under. . . . Not Hampstead; Richmond Park was finally decided upon.

"We'll taxi to Waterloo," the boy said, with an inward doubt. He dived a long brown hand into his pocket as they walked together down the road that Gwenna used to take every morning to her Westminster bus. He was particularly short of money just then. Dashed nuisance! Just when he would have wished to be particularly flush! That's what came of buying a clock for the Machine before it was wanted. Still, he couldn't let the Little Thing here know that. Manage somehow. A taxi came rattling down the Pond Street Hill from Belsize Park as they reached the stopping-place of the buses, and Paul held up his hand.

"Taxi!"

But the driver shook his head. He pulled up the taxi in front of a small, rather mean-looking house

close to where Gwenna and Paul were standing on the pavement. Then his fare came out of the house, a kit-bag in each hand and a steamer-rug thrown over his arm; he was a small, compactly-built young man in clothes so new and so smart that they seemed oddly out of place with the slatternly entrance of his lodging-house. It was this that made Paul Dampier look a little hard at him. Gwenna was wondering where she'd seen that blonde, grave face of his before.

He sprang lightly into the cab; a pink-faced girl was sitting there, whom Gwenna did not see. If she had seen her, she would have recognized her Westminster colleague, Ottilie Becker.

"Liverpool Street," ordered Miss Becker's companion, setting down his luggage.

Then, raising his head, he caught the eyes upon him of the other young man in the street. He put a hand to his hat, gave a quick little odd smile, and leaned forward out of the cab.

"*Auf Wiedersehen!*" he called, as the taxi started off—for Liverpool Street.

"Deuce did he mean by that?" exclaimed the young Englishman, staring after the cab. "Who on earth was that fellow? I didn't know him."

"Nor did I. But I *have* seen him," said Gwenna.

"I believe I have, somewhere," said Paul, musing.

They puzzled over it for a bit as they went on to Waterloo on the top of their bus.

And then, when they were passing "The Horse Shoe" in Tottenham Court Road, and when they were talking about something quite different (about the river-dance, in fact), they both broke off talking sharply. Gwenna, with a little jump on the slanting front seat, exclaimed, "I know—!" Just as Paul said, "By Jove! I've got it! I know who that

fellow was. That German fellow just now. He was one of the waiters at that very dance, Gwenna ! "

Gwenna, turning, said breathlessly, " Yes, I know. The one who passed us on the path. But I've thought of something else, too. I thought then his face reminded me of somebody's ; I know now who it is. It's that fair young man who came down to try and be taken on at the Works."

" At Westminster ? " Paul asked quickly.

" No ; at the Aircraft Works one afternoon. He talked English awfully well, and he said he was Swiss. And then André—you know, the big, dark French workman—talked to him for quite a long time in French ; he said he seemed very intelligent. But he wouldn't give him a job, whatever."

" He wouldn't ? "

" No. I heard him tell the Aeroplane Lady that the young man (' *ce garçon-là* ') came from the wrong canton," said Gwenna. " So he went away. I saw him go out. He was awfully *like* that German waiter. I suppose most Germans look alike, to us."

" S'pose so," said the Aviator, adding, " Was that the day that drawing of mine was missing from the Aircraft Works, I wonder ? "

She looked at him, surprised. " I didn't know one of your drawings was missing, Paul."

" Yes. It didn't matter, as it happened. Drawing of a detail for my Machine. I've taken jolly good care not to have complete drawings of it anywhere," he said, with a little nod.

And some minutes later they had begun to talk of something else again, as the bus lurched on through the hot, deserted Sunday streets.

* * * * * *

The morning that had brought Gwenna to her lover left Gwenna's chum for once at a loose end.

"Leslie, my child, aren't you a little tired of being the looker-on who sees most of the game? Won't you take a hand?" Miss Long asked herself as she went back into her Club bedroom. It was scented with the fresh smell of the rosemary and bay-rum that Leslie used for her ink-black sheaf of hair, and there drifted in through the open window the sound of bells from all the churches.

"Sunday. My free morning! '*The better the day.*' So I'll settle up at last what I am going to do about this little matter of my future," she decided.

She sat down at the little bamboo writing-table set against the bedroom wall. Above it there hung (since this was a girl's room!) a looking-glass; and about the looking-glass there was festooned a little garland made up of dance-programmes, dangling by their pencils, of gaudy paper-fans from restaurants, and of strung beads. Stuck crookedly into a corner of the glass there was a cockling snapshot. It showed Monty Scott's dark head above his sculptor's blouse. Leslie picked it out and looked at it.

"Handsome, wicked eyes," she said to it lightly. "The only wicked things about you, you unsophisticated infant-in-arms!" Then she said, "You and your sculpturing! . . . *Just* like a baby with its box of bricks. Besides, I don't suppose you'll ever have a penny. One doesn't marry a man because one may like the *look* of him. No, boy."

She flicked the snapshot aside. There was conscientious carelessness in the flick.

Then she took out the leather-cased ink-bottle from her dressing-bag, and some paper.

She wrote: "MY DEAR HUGO——"

Then she stopped and thought—" Maudie and Hilary Smith will be pleased with me. So will the cousins, the opulent cousins who've always been kind about clothes they've finished wearing, and invitations to parties where they want another girl to brighten things up. You can give some bright parties for *them* now, Leslie! Good Reason Number Ninety-nine for saying 'Yes.' "

She took up her pen.

" Nothing," she murmured, " *Nothing* will ever kill the idea that *the girl who isn't married is the girl who hasn't been asked.* Nothing will ever spoil the satisfaction of that girl when showing that she *has!* "

She wrote down the date, which she had forgotten.

" Poor Monty would be so much more decorative for 'show' purposes. But I explained quite frankly to Hugo that it would be his money I'd want! "

She wrote, " *After thinking it well over*——"

Then again she meditated.

" Great things, reasons! The reason why so many marriages aren't a success is because they haven't *enough* 'reasons why' behind them. Now, how far had I got with mine—ah, yes. Reason Number a Hundred: I'm twenty-six; I shall never be any better-looking than I am now. Not unless I'm better-dressed. Which (Reason a Hundred and One) I should be if I married Hugo. Reason a Hundred and Two: my old lady won't live for ever, and I should never get a better job than hers. Except his. Reason Number a Hundred and Two and a Half: I do quite like him. He doesn't expect anything more, so there's the other half-reason for taking him. Reason a Hundred and Four: *he's* never disapproved of me. Whereas Monty always likes me against his better judgment. Much nicer for me, but annoying for a husband. I should

make Hugo an excellent wife." She added this half-aloud (to the snapshot).

"I should never shock *him*. Never bore him. Never interfere with him. Never make him look silly—any sillier than he can't help looking with that hair and that necktie he will wear. Leslie would have the sense, when she wasn't amusing him at the moment, to retire to her *own rooms* (Reason a Hundred and Five for marrying well), and to stay there until she was fetched. Reason a——"

Here, in the full flow of her reasoning, Miss Long cast suddenly and rather violently down her pen, and tore the sheet with Hugo's name in it into tiny strips that she cast into the empty fireplace.

"I can't *think* to write a good letter to-day!" she excused herself to herself as she got up from her chair. "I'm tired. . . . It was all that talking from Taffy last night. Bother the child. *Bother* her. It's *unsettling!*— Bother *all* engaged girls. (*And all the people shall say Amen.*) I wonder where they went to? . . . I shall ring up somebody to take me on the river, I think. Plenty of time to say 'Yes' to Hugo later."

The letter to Hugo, between the lines of which there had come the vision of an engaged girl's happy face, remained, for the present, unfinished.

Leslie went to the telephone.

"O-o-o Chelsea," she called. "I want to speak to Mr. Scott, please."

She thought, "This shall be my last free Sunday, and I'll have it in peace!"

* * * * * *

In Richmond Park the grass was doubly cool and green beneath the shade both of the oaks and of the

breast-high bracken where Gwenna and Paul Dampier sat, eating the fruit and cake that they had bought on the way, and talking with long stretches of contented silence.

They were near enough actually to London and the multitude. But town and people seemed far away, out of their world to-day.

Gwenna's soft, oddly-accented voice said presently into the warm stillness, "You'll take me up this afternoon?"

"Up?" he said idly. "Where to?"

"Up flying, of course."

"No, I don't think so," said the young Airman quietly, putting his chin in his hand as he lay in his favourite attitude, chest downwards in the grass, looking at her.

"Not flying? Not this afternoon?"

"Don't think so, Little Thing."

"Oh, you're lazy," she teased him, touching a finger to his fair head and taking it quickly back again. "You don't want to move."

"Not going to move, either; not until I've got to."

She sighed, not too disappointed.

Here in the dappled shade and the solitude with him it was heavenly enough; even if she did glance upward at the peeps of sapphire-blue through the leaves and wonder what added rapture it would be to soar to those heights with her lover.

"D'you know how many times you've put me off?" she said presently, fanning the midges away from herself with her broad white hat. "Always you've said you'd take me flying with you, Paul. And always there's been something to stop it. Let's settle it now. Now, when will you?"

"Ah," he said, and flung the stone of the peach

he'd been eating into the dark green jungle of bracken ahead of them. "Good shot. I wanted to see if I could get that knob on that branch."

She moved nearer to him and said coaxingly, "What about next Sunday?"

"Hope it'll be as fine as this," he said, smiling at her. "I'd like all the Sundays to be just like this one. Can't think what I did with all the ripping days before this, Gwenna."

She said, "I meant, what about your taking me up next Sunday?"

"Nothing about it," he said, shaking his head. There was a little pause. He crossed his long legs in the grass and said, "Not next Sunday. Nor the Sunday after that. Nor any Sunday. Nor any time. I may as well tell you now. You aren't ever coming flying," said the young aviator firmly to his sweetheart. "I've settled *that*."

The cherub face of the girl looked blankly into his. "But, Paul! No flying? Why? Surely—It's safe enough now!"

"Safe enough for me—and for most people."

"But you've taken Miss Conyers and plenty of girls flying."

"Girls. Yes."

"And you *promised* to take me!"

"That was ages ago. That was when you were a girl too."

"Well, what am I now, pray?"

"Don't you know? Not '*a* girl.' *My* Girl!" he said.

Then he moved. He knelt up beside her. He made love to her sweetly enough to cause her to forget all else for a time. And presently, flushed and shy and enraptured, she brought out of her vanity-bag the tiny

white wing that was to be his mascot, and she safety-pinned it inside the breast of his old grey jacket.

"That ought to be fastened somewhere to the P.D.Q.," he suggested. But she shook her head. No. It was not for the P.D.Q. It was for him to wear.

Then she saw him weighing in his hand her own mascot, the little mother-of-pearl heart with the silver chain.

"Ah! You did remember to bring it, at last?" she said.

Nestling against his arm, she lifted her chin and waited for him to snap the trinket about her neck.

He laughed and hesitated. She looked at him rather wonderingly. Then he made a confession.

"D'you know, I—I do hate to have to give it back again, Gwenna. I've had it *so* long. Might as well let me hold on to it. May I?"

"Oh, you are greedy for keepsakes," she said, delighted. "What would you *do* with a thing like that?"

"I've thought of something," said he, nodding at her.

She asked, "What?"

"Tell you another time," he smiled, with the locket clutched in the hand that was about her waist. She flung back her head happily against his shoulder, curling herself up like a kitten in his hold. They had settled that they were going to walk on to Kew Gardens to tea, but it was not time yet, and it was so peaceful here. Scarcely anyone passed them in that nook of the Park. Another happy silence fell upon the lovers. It was long before the boy broke it, asking softly, "You do like being with me, don't you?" There was no answer from the girl.

"Do you, Gwenna?" It seemed still odd to be

able to call her whatever he liked, now! "Do you, my Little Sweet Thing?"

Still she didn't answer. He bent closer to look at her. . . . Her long eyelashes lay like two little dark half-moons upon her cheeks and her white blouse fell and rose softly to her breathing. Drowsy from the late hours she'd kept last night and from the sun-warmed silence under the trees, she had fallen asleep in his arms. Her eyes were still shut when at last she heard his deep and gentle voice again in her ear, "I suppose you know you owe me several pairs of gloves, miss!"

She laughed sleepily, returning (still a little shyly and unfamiliarly!) the next kiss that he put on her parted lips.

"I was *nearly* asleep," she said, with a little sudden stretch that ran all over her like a shake given to a sheet of white aluminium at the Works. "Isn't it quiet? Feels as if *everything* was asleep." She opened her eyes, blinking at the rays of the sun, now level in her face. "Oh, I *should* like some tea, wouldn't you?"

They rose to go and find a place for tea in Kew Gardens, among the happy, lazing Sunday crowds of those whom it has been the fashion to treat so condescendingly: England's big Middle-classes. There were the conventional young married couples; "She" wearing out the long tussore coat that seemed so voluminous; "He" pipe in mouth, wheeling the wicker mail-cart that held their pink-and-white bud of a baby. There were also courting couples innumerable. . . .

(Not all of these were as reticent in the public eye as Gwenna had been with her lover before Leslie.)

To Gwenna the bright landscape and the coloured

figures seemed a page out of some picture-book that she turned idly, her lover beside her. She had to remind herself that to these other lovers she herself and Paul were also part of a half-seen picture. . . .

They sat down at one of the green wooden tea-tables, and a waiter in a greasy black coat came out under the trees to take Dampier's order. Perhaps that started another train of thought in the girl's mind, for quite suddenly she exclaimed, "Ah! I've thought of *another* German now that he was like!"

"Who was that?" asked Paul.

"Only a picture I used to see every day. A photograph that our Miss Baker kept pinned up over her desk at the works in Westminster," explained Gwenna. "The photograph of that brother of hers that she was always writing those long letters to."

"Always writing, was she? Was *he* a waiter?"

"No, he was a soldier. He was in uniform in that photo," Gwenna said, as the little tray was set before her. "Karl was his name, Karl Becker. . . . Do you take sugar?"

"Yes. You'll have to remember that for later on," he said, looking at her with his head tilted back and a laugh in his eyes, as she poured out his tea. She handed it to him, and then sat sipping her own, looking dreamily over the English gardens, over the green spaces flowered with the light frocks and white flannels of other couples who perhaps called themselves "in love," and who possibly imagined they could ever feel as she and her lover felt. (Deluded beings!)

She murmured, "What do you suppose all these people are thinking about?"

"Oh! Whether they'll go to Brighton or to Southend for their fortnight, I expect," returned Paul Dampier. "Everybody's thinking about holidays just now."

Later, they stood together in the hushed gloom of the big chestnut aisle beside the river that slipped softly under Kew Bridge, passing the willows and islands and the incongruously rural-looking street of Strand-on-the-Green. One of the cottage-windows there showed red blinds, lighted up and homely.

Young Dampier whispered to his girl—"Going on holidays myself, perhaps, presently, eh?"

"Oh, Paul!" she said blankly, "you aren't going away for a holiday, are you?"

"Not yet, thanks. Not without you."

"Oh!" she said. Then she sighed happily, watching the stars. "To-day's been the loveliest holiday I've ever had in my life. Hasn't it been perfect?"

"Not quite," he said, with his eyes on those red-lighted windows on the opposite bank. "Not perfect, Gwen."

"Not——?" she took up quickly, wondering if she had said something that he didn't like.

Almost roughly he broke out, "Oh, I say, darling! *Don't* let's go and have one of these infernally long engagements, shall we?"

She turned, surprised.

"We said," she reminded him, "that we weren't 'engaged' at all."

"I know," he said. Then he laughed as he stooped and kissed her little ringless fingers and the palms of her hands. "But——"

There was a pause.

"Got to *marry* me one day, you know," said young Paul Dampier seriously.

He might have spoken more seriously still if he had known that what he said must happen in ten days' time from then.

CHAPTER IV

THAT WEEK-END

FOR the following week-end saw, among many other things that had not been bargained for, those lovers apart again.

The very next Saturday after that Aviation Dinner was that not-to-be-forgotten day in England, when this country, still uncertain, weighed the part that she was to play in the Great War.

Late on the Friday night of an eventful week, Paul Dampier, the Airman, had received a summons from Colonel Conyers.

And Gwenna, who had left the Aircraft Works on Saturday morning to come up to her Hampstead Club, found there her lover's message:

"Away till Monday. Wait for me."

She waited with Leslie.

On that bright afternoon the two girls had walked, as they had so often walked together, about the summer-burnt Heath that was noisy with cricketers on the grass. They had turned down by the ponds where bathers dived from the platforms set above the willows; clean-built English youths splashing and shouting and laughing joyously over their sport. Last time

Gwenna had been with her chum it was she, the girl in love, who had done all the talking, while Leslie listened.

Now it was Leslie who was restless, strung-up, talkative. . . . A new Leslie, her dark eyes anxious and sombre, her usually nonchalant voice strained as she talked.

"Taffy! D'you realize what it all means? Supposing we don't go in. We may not go in to war with the others. I know lots of people in this country will do their best so that we don't lift a finger. People like the Smiths; my brother-in-law's people. Well-to-do, hating anything that might get in the way of their having a good year and grubbing up as much money as usual. . . . Oh! If we don't go in, I shall emigrate—I shall turn American—I shan't want to call myself English any more! P'raps you don't mind because you're Welsh."

Little Gwenna, who was rather pale, but who had a curious stillness over the growing anxiety in her heart, said, "Of course I mind."

She did not add her thoughts, "*He* said he hoped the War would come in his time. I know *he* would think it perfectly awful if England didn't fight. And even I can feel that it would be horribly mean—just *looking on* at fighting when it came."

Leslie, striding beside her up the hill, went on bitterly, "War! Oh, it can't come. For years we've said so. Haven't we taken good care not to let ourselves get 'hysterical' over the German 'scare'? Haven't we disbanded regiments? Haven't we beaten our swords into cash-registers? Haven't we even kept down the Navy? Haven't we spread and spread the idea that soldiering was a silly, obsolete kind of game? Aren't we quite clever and enlightened enough

to look down upon soldiers as a kind of joke? The brainless Army type. Don't let's forget *that* phrase," urged the soldier's daughter. "Why, Taffy, I'll tell you what happened only last May. I went to Gamage's to get a birthday present for Hilary, my sister Maudie's little boy. Of course he's *got* heaps of everything a child wants. Delightful floor games. Beautiful hand-wrought artistic toys (made in Munich). Still, I thought he might like a change. I told the man in the shop I wanted a toy-book of soldiers. Nice simple drawings and jolly, crude, bright colours of all the different regiments. Like we used to have at home. And what d'you suppose the shopman said? He was very sorry, but 'they' hadn't stocked that class of thing for some time now; so little demand for it! So little demand for anything that reminds us we've got an Empire to keep!"

Gwenna said half absently, "It was only toys, Leslie."

"Only one more sign of what we're coming to! *Teaching the young idea not to shoot,*" said Leslie gloomily. "That, and a million other trifles, are going to settle it, I'm afraid. If England is to come down, *that's* the sort of thing that will have done it. . . . Oh, Leslie's been in it, too, and all her friends. Dancing and drifting and dressing-up while Rome's been burning. . . . There'll be no war, Taffy."

Gwenna said, quietly and convinced, "Yes, there will." And she quoted the saying of the lady at the Aviation Dinner, "*If England is ever to be saved, it will be by the few.*"

* * * * * *

They walked round the Highgate Ponds and down the steep hill between the little, ramshackle, Victorian-

looking shops of Heath Street. It was busy as ever on a Saturday afternoon. They passed the usual troop of Boy Scouts; the usual straggle of cricketers and lovers from or for the Heath, and then a knot of rather boyish-looking girls and girlish-looking boys wearing the art-green school-cap of some co-educational institution.

"What sort of soldiers do we expect those boys ever to make?" demanded Leslie.

Outside the dark-red-tiled entrance to the Hampstead Tube there was a little crowd of people gathered about the paper-sellers with their pink arresting posters of

"RUMOURS OF WAR
ENGLAND'S DECISION."

"They'll publish a dozen before anything *is* decided," said Leslie. She bought a paper, Gwenna another. . . .

No; nothing in them but surmise—suspense—theories—they walked on, passing Miss Armitage from the Club who had paused on the kerb to talk to one of her friends, a long-haired man in a broad-leafed brown hat. He seemed to be dispensing pamphlets to people in the street. As Miss Armitage smiled and nodded good-bye to him the two other girls came up. He of the locks slipped a pamphlet into the hand of Leslie Long.

She glanced at it, stopped, and looked at it again. It was headed:

"BRITAIN, STAND ASIDE!"

Leslie stood for a moment and regarded this

male. She said very gently, "You don't want any War?"

The long-haired person in the gutter gave a shrug and a little superior smile. "Oh, well, that's assumed, isn't it?" he said. "*We* don't want any War."

"Or any *country*, I suppose?" said Leslie, walking on. She held the pamphlet a little gingerly between her finger and thumb. She had thought of tossing it into the gutter—but no. She kept it as a curiosity.

* * * * * *

Late that night she sat on Gwenna Williams' bed at the Club, suspense eating at her heart. For all the soldier blood in her had taken her back to old times in barracks, or in shabby lodging-houses in garrison towns, or on echoing, sunny parade-grounds. . . . Times before she had drifted into the gay fringes of the cosmopolitan jungle of Bohemian life in London. Before the Hospital, the Art-school, the daily "job," with her evenings for the theatre and the Crab-tree Club, and the dances she loved. It is the first ten years of a child's life that are said to "count." They counted now. The twenty-six-year-old Leslie, whose childhood had been passed within sound of the bugle-call, waited, waited, waited to know if the ideas of honour and country and glory which she had taken in unconsciously in those far-off times were now to be tossed down into the gutter as she would have tossed the leaflet of that coward. These things, as Miss Armitage and her friends could have told her, were mere sentimentalities—names—ideas. Yet what has ever proved stronger than an Idea?

"Oh, *Taffy!*" she sighed impatiently. "If we're told that we're to sit still and nothing will happen?"

And little Gwenna, lying curled up with a hand in her chum's, murmured again, "*That's* not what's coming."

She was quiet because she was dazed with the sheer intensity of her own more personal anxiety. "What will happen about Paul? What will *he* do?"

CHAPTER V

THE DIE IS CAST

ON Sunday morning she and Leslie went to Church. In the afternoon they walked again, aimlessly. She felt that she was only living until Monday, until his return to tell her something. In the evening the two girls sat out on a seat on Parliament Hill; near where the man with the standing telescope used to offer peeps at London for a penny a time. Far, far below, lay London under her web of twinkling lights. London, England's heart, with that silver ribbon of the river running through it. Leslie looked away over that prospect as though she had never seen it before. Little Gwenna turned from it to the view on the other side—the grass spaces and the trees towards Hendon. She thought, "On a night as clear as this, aeroplanes could easily go up, even late."

As the two girls reached the Club again they found a motor drawn up beside the entrance. Steps came out of the darkness behind them. A man's voice said "Miss Long." Leslie turned.

There moved into the light of the street-lamp Hugo Swayne. His face, somehow, had never looked less like an imitation of Chopin; or more like an ordinary commonplace Englishman's. It was serious, set. Yet it was exultant. For he, too, was a soldier's son.

He spoke. " I say, I thought I'd bring you the news," he began gravely. " It's all right. England goes in."

" Is that official ? " Leslie asked sharply.

There was a shaky little " War ? " from Gwenna.

Then came other, quick steps on the asphalt path, and the girls saw over Hugo's rather portly shoulder a taller, slighter figure coming up the road behind him.

It was hatless ; the lamplight shone golden on its blonde head. Gwenna's heart leaped to her lips.

" Paul ! " she cried, and made a running step towards him. In a moment young Dampier was up with the others ; the quartette standing as they had stood on that spring night in this same place, after the Smiths' dinner-party. There were hasty greetings, murmurs of " Not official ? "

" Ah, that's all right——"

" They won't say for a day or so, but——"

Then, clear and distinct, young Dampier's boyish voice rang out in a curious announcement. " Glad *you're* here, Hugo. I was coming to you. I want to borrow rather a lot of money of you, at once. Forty pounds, I think it is. Sorry. Must have it. It's for a marriage-licence ! "

Hugo, utterly taken aback, stared and murmured, " My dear chap—— Certain—— A m——? "

" Yes. I shall have to be off, you know. Of course. And I shall get married before I go," announced Paul Dampier, brusquely.

He turned as brusquely to the girl.

" You and I are going to get married by special licence," he told her, " the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI

HER GUARDIAN'S CONSENT

THE Reverend Hugh Lloyd, who was Gwenna Williams' only relative and guardian and therefore the person from whom consent might be asked if ever the girl wished to be engaged, sat reading *The Cambrian News*. He sat, over his breakfast eggs and tea, in the kitchen-sitting-room of his Chapel House. Inside, the grandfather clock ticked slowly but still pointed (as ever) to half-past two; and the cosy room, with its Welsh dresser and its book-shelves, still held its characteristic smell of singeing hearthrug. Outside, quiet brooded over the valley that fine August morning. The smoke from the village chimneys rose blue and straight against the larches of the hill-side. The more distant hills of that landscape were faintly mauve against the cloudless, fainter blue of the late-summer sky. All the world seemed so peaceful!

And the expression on the Reverend Hugh's face of a Jesuit priest under its thatch of bog-cotton hair was that of a man at peace with all the world.

True, there were rumours, in some of the newspapers, of some War going on somewhere in the world outside.

But it was a long way from here to that old Continent, as they called it! For the matter of that, it was a long

way to London, where they settled what they were going to do about Germany. . . .

What they were going to do about Welsh Disestablishment was a good deal more important, to a Welshman. There were some very good things about that in this very article. The Reverend Hugh had written it himself.

Presently, in the midst of his reading, his housekeeper (who was a small, middle-aged woman, rather like a black hen) entered the room at a run.

"Telegram for you, sir."

"Ah, yes; thank you, Margat," her master said as he took it.

He had guessed already what was in it. Some arrangement to do with his next Sabbath-day's journey. For he was a very popular preacher, invited to give sermons by exchange in every country town in Wales.

"This," he told his housekeeper complacently, as he tore open the envelope, "will be to say am I ex Pec[illegible] in Carnarvon on the Sat Teudêh, or——"

Here he broke off, staring at the message in [illegible] It was a long one.

There was a moment's silence while t[illegible] Then that silence was broken by [illegible] Welsh, from a man startled o[illegible] decorum. He added, with r[illegible] Welsh, "Great King!"

Then he exclaimed, [illegible] of goodness!"

"What is it, M[illegible] keeper excited[illegible] wool shawl [illegible] of the h[illegible]

"I[illegible]

Again he read through the longest telegraph message that he had ever received :

It ran :

" *Dear Sir am going to marry your niece Gwenna to-morrow Tuesday morning at Hampstead regret forced to give you this short notice but impossible to do otherwise owing military duties trust you will excuse apparent casualness will write further particulars yours sincerely Paul Dampier Lieutenant Royal Flying Corps.*"

" *Name* of goodness ! " breathed the Reverend Hugh, brushing back his white locks in consternation. And at short intervals he continued to ejaculate. " What did I tell her ? *What* did I tell her ! . . . Indeed, it's a great pity I ever let her go away from home. . . . It was my fault ; my fault. . . . Young men—— ! This sounds as if he was gone quite mad, whatever."

The Reverend Hugh addressed his answer to Miss Williams at her Club.

It ran :

see you nine-thirty Euston to-night.

* * *

rid about it," Gwenna hed that evening, as in dark blue and he platform at o come in. nknown ery

"He was always rather a dret-ful old man," she confided anxiously to Paul, as they paced the sooty flags of the platform. "It's *just* like him to be sixteen minutes late already just when I want to get this over. He never understands anything about—about people when they're young. And the first thing he's sure to ask is whether you've got any money. Have you, Paul?"

"Stacks," said the Airman, reassuringly. "Old Hugo made it sixty, as a wedding-present. Decent of him, wasn't it?"

They turned by the blackboard with the chalked-up notices of arrivals and departures, and Gwenna ruefully went on with her prophecy of what her Uncle would say.

"He'll say he never *heard* of anybody marrying an Airman. (I don't suppose he's ever heard of an Airman at all before now!) Ministers, and quarry-managers, and people *with some prospects*; that's the sort of thing they've always married in Uncle Hugh's family," she said anxiously. "And he'll say we've both behaved awfully badly not to let him know before this. (Just as if there was anything to know.) And he'll say you turned my silly head when I was much too young to know my own mind! And then he's quite, quite sure to say that you only proposed to me because—— Well, of course," she broke off a little reproachfully, "you never even *did* propose to me properly!"

"Too late to start it now," said her lover laughing, as the knot of porters surged forward to the side of the platform. "Here's the train coming in!"

* * * * * *

Now Gwenna was right about the first thing that Uncle Hugh would ask, when, after a searching glance

and a handshake to this tall young man that his niece introduced to him at the carriage-door, he carried off the pair of them to the near-by hotel where the Minister always put up on his few and short visits to London.

"Well, young gentleman," he began, in his crisp yet deliberate Welsh accent. He settled himself on the red plush sofa, and gazed steadily at Paul Dampier on one of the red plush armchairs. "Well! And have you got the money reck-quisite to keep a wife?"

"No. I'm afraid I haven't, sir, really," returned the young man, looking frankly back at him. "Of course I'd my screw. Three pounds ten a week, I was getting as a pilot. But that was only just enough for myself—with what I had to do for the Machine. Of course I'm going to have her—the Flying Machine—taken up now, so——"

"It's very little faith I have in such things as flying machines. Flying? Yes, in the face of Providence, I call it," said the Reverend Hugh, discouragingly, but with the dawn of some amusement in his searching eyes. "What I say about the whole idea of Avi*ay*-shon is—*Kite-high lunacy!*"

"Uncle!" scolded Gwenna; blushing for him. But the young Airman took the rebuke soberly enough.

"And out of that income," went on Uncle Hugh, still looking hard, at this modern suitor in that incongruous red-plush setting with its Nineteenth Century clocks and ornaments, "out of that income you will not have saved very much."

"Afraid not, sir," agreed young Dampier, who, last night, had been down to his last eightpence ha'penny and a book of stamps. "Not much to put by, you know——"

"Not even," took up the Reverend Hugh, shrewdly, "enough to pay for a special marriage licence?"

"Oh, yes, I had that. That is, I've raised *that*"—("Good old Hugo!" he thought.)—"and a bit over," he added, "to take us for some sort of a little trip. To the sea, perhaps. Before I go on Service."

"Military service, do you mean?" said the Reverend Hugh. "Mmph! (I never have held with soldiery. I do not think that I have ever come into act—ual con—tackt with *any*.)"

"Yes, I probably am going on Service, Mr. Lloyd," answered the young man, quickly, and with a glance at the girl that seemed to indicate that this subject was only to be lightly dealt with at present. "When, I am not sure. Then I shall get my pay as a Flight-Lieutenant, you see. Shan't want any money much, then. So *she*"—with a little nod towards the small, defensively set face of Gwenna, sitting very straight in the other red-plush armchair—"she will get that sent home, to her."

"*I* shan't want all your pay, indeed," interrupted the girl, hastily. It seemed to her too revoltingly horrible, this talk about money combined with this sense that a woman, married, must be an *expense*, a burden. A woman, who longs to mean only freedom and gifts and treasure to her lover!

"Oh, a woman ought never, *never* to feel she has to be *kept*," thought Gwenna, rosy again with embarrassment. "If men don't think we *mind*, very well, then let all the money in the world be taken away from men, and given to us. Let *them* be kept. And if they don't mind it—well, then it will be a happier world, all round!"

And as she was thinking this, she announced eagerly, "If—if you *do* go away, I shall stay on with the Aeroplane Lady, as I told you, Paul. Yes. I'd *much* rather I should have something to do. And I'd get nearly a

pound a week, and my keep. Besides! I've got my own money."

"Which money, dear?" asked Paul Dampier.

The quick eyes of the Reverend Hugh had not left the young man's face.

They were fixed still more scrutinizingly upon it as the old man interposed, "Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Dampier, that you were not aware that my niece had got a little bit of her own?"

"There! I *knew* Uncle would say that!" burst out the young girl, angry and blushing and ashamed. "I knew he'd say you were only marrying me because of that! *He* won't believe that it wouldn't make any difference to you that I've got seventy-five pounds a year!"

"Seventy-five pounds a year? *Have* you?" said the young man, surprised. "Really?"

And it was Gwenna's turn to be surprised as his frank face cleared and his voice took a very relieved note.

"I say, how topping! Make no difference to me? But it does. Rather!" he declared. "Don't you see that I shall know you won't *have* to work, and that I shall be ever so much more comfortable about you? Why did you never tell me?"

"I forgot," said Gwenna truly.

And the Reverend Hugh suddenly laughed aloud.

At the same time he hoped he had concealed his relief, which was great. His youngest sister's girl was not going to be snapped up by a fortune-hunter after all. That had always been his anxiety. Seventy-five pounds a year (certain) remained a considerable fortune to this Victorian. In his valley quite a large house, with a nice bit of garden, too (running steeply up a mountain-side), was to be had for a rent of sixteen pounds. He would have thought of that himself. . . . But the

leggy, fair-haired boy who was now smiling across the oval hotel table at his Gwenna had meant only what he had said. The older man realized that. So, waiving for the present the question of means, the Reverend Hugh went on, in rather a modified tone, to ask other questions.

Asking questions of the newly accepted suitor seems to be all that remains for the parent or guardian of our times. It is the sole survival of that potent authority which once disposed (or said it disposed) of the young lady's hand. Clearing his throat with the same little sound that so often heralded the words of some text from his pulpit, the Reverend Hugh began by inquiring where Gwenna, after her short honeymoon, was supposed to be going to live?

Nowhere new, it appeared! She had her berth at the Aircraft Factory, her room at Mrs. Crewe's cottage for when young Dampier was away. (Yes; from his tone when he spoke of it, evidently that parting was to be kept in the background and evaded as much as possible for the present.) And if he were in London, he had his rooms in Camden Town. Do for them both, perhaps. . . . His bachelor digs.; not bad ones. . . .

Well, but no *house?* Dear me. That was a gipsyish sort of plan, wasn't it? That was a new idea of setting up housekeeping to Uncle Hugh. He, himself, was an old bachelor. But he could see that this was all very different from the ideas of all the young couples in *his* time. When Gwenna's father, now, was courting Gwenna's mother, well! he, Hugh Lloyd, had never heard such a lot of talk about *Mahoggani*. *And* tebbel-linen. *And* who was to have the three feather-beds from the old Quarry-house; Gwenna's mother, or Gwenna's mother's sister——

(All this the Reverend Hugh declaimed in his most

distinct Chapel voice, but still with his searching eyes upon the face of the husband-to-be.)

The idea of most young girls, in getting married, he thought, was to get a nice home of their own, as soon as possible. A comfortable house——

("I hate comfortable houses. So stuffy. Just like a tea-cosy. They'd *smother* me!" from Gwenna.)

But the House, her Uncle Hugh had *Olwês* understood, was the Woman's fetish? Spring-cleaning, now; the yearly rites! And that furniture. "The Lares," he went on in an ever-strengthening Welsh accent. "The Pen—nates——!"

"Oh, *those!*" scoffed the girl in love. "*Those——!*"

So Gwenna didn't seem to think she would miss these things? She was willing to marry without them? Yes? Strange! . . . Well, well!

And what about this marriage-in-haste? Where was it to take place? In that Church in Hampstead? A Church. Well! He, as an orthodox dissenting minister, ought not, perhaps, to enter such a place of worship. But, after all, this was not at home. This was only up here, in England. Perhaps it wouldn't matter, just this once.

And who was the clergyman who was going to officiate at the cerrymonny? And what sort of a preacher, now, was *he?* (This was not known.)

And Mr. Dampier's own relations? Would they all be at the Church?

Only one cousin, he was told. That was the only relation Paul Dampier had left.

"Same ass myself," said the Reverend Hugh, a little quietly. "A big family, we were. Six boys, two girls; like people used to have. All gone. Nothing left, but——"

Here, for the first time taking his eyes from young

Dampier, he turned upon his niece with an abrupt question. With a quick nod towards her husband-to-be, he demanded: "And where did you find *him?*"

Little Gwenna, still on the defensive, but thawing gradually (since, after all, Uncle Hugh had spoken in friendly tones to the Beloved), Gwenna asked, "When, Uncle?"

"The time that counts, my girl," said the Reverend Hugh; "the first time."

"Oh! I think it was—it was at a party I went to with my friend, Miss Long, that I've told you about," explained Gwenna, a little nervously. "And—and he was there. It's—*quite* a long time ago, now."

"Dear me," said the Reverend Hugh. "Dukes! There is a lot of things seem to go on, still, under the name of 'Party.'" And there was a sudden and quite young twinkle in the eyes under the white thatch.

Paul Dampier, not seeing it, began hastily: "I hope you understand, sir, that we were only keeping all this to ourselves, because—well——" He cleared his throat and made another start. "If I'd had the—er—the privilege of seeing Gwenna at your place——" Yet another start. "We had no *idea*, of course," said Paul Dampier, "until fairly recently——"

"Dear me," said the Reverend Hugh again. Then, turning to the young man whom Gwenna had said he would accuse of turning the head of one too young to know her own mind, he remarked with some feeling, "I dare say she had made up her mind, that first time, not to give you a bit of peace until you'd sent off that telly-gram to me!"

* * * * * *

As he was taking the bride-to-be back to her Club, young Dampier said, smiling: "Why, darling, he's not a bad old chap at all! You said he wouldn't understand anything!"

"Well, he doesn't," persisted the mutinous Gwenna. But she laughed a little, relentingly.

Twenty minutes later her lover took his leave with a whispered "Good-night. Do you know that I shan't ever have to say it again at this blessed door, after this? . . . And another, for luck. . . . Good-*night*—er—Miss Williams!"

She ran upstairs humming a tune.

She was so happy that she could feel kind even to old and unsympathetic and cynical people to-night.

To-morrow she was to be Paul Dampier's wife.

It was hardly believable, still it was true!

War, now threatening to tear him from her, had at least brought him to her, first, sooner than she had ever hoped. Even if he were forced to leave her quite soon, say in a month's time!—she would have had him all to herself first, without any of these small, fretting good-byes that came so punctually following every meeting! She would have *been* all his; his very own, she thought.

And here it may be said that upon this subject Gwenna Williams' thoughts were curiously, almost incredibly vague. That dormant bud of passion knew so little of its own hidden root.

Marriage! To this young girl it was a journey into a country of which she had never formed any clear idea. Her own dreams had been the rosy mists that obscured alike the heights and depths of that scarcely guessed-at land. All she saw, clearly, was her fellow traveller; the dear boy-comrade and sweetheart who would not now leave her side. What did it

matter where he took her, so that it was with him always?

Only one more night, now, in the long, narrow Club bedroom where she had dreamed that queer flying dream, and so many others, so many longing day-dreams about him!

To-morrow was her wedding-day!

CHAPTER VII

HASTE TO THE WEDDING!

THE Tuesday morning that brought Gwenna's wedding-day was the morning of the official declaration of war.

It was in all the papers over which the girls at the Hampstead Club pored, before they went off to their various avocations, staring, half-realizing only.

"Can it be true? . . . War? . . . Nowadays? . . . Good gracious! . . . D'you suppose it means we shall really have to send an army of ours—an English Army—over to France? . . . What do you think, Miss Armitage?"

Miss Armitage, the suffragette, then became voluble on the subject of how very different all would have been if women had had the casting vote in the matter. Intelligent women. Women with some insight into the wider interests of their sex. . . . Not mere—— Here, by way of illustration, this Feminist shot a vicious glance at Miss Long. Now, Leslie, dressed in a lilac river-frock and wearing her black picture hat, was going round the breakfast-table, under the very eye of the disapproving Lady Principal with the gold curb brooch, on an errand of her own. She was collecting from it the daintiest bits of dry toast, the nicest-looking pats of butter, a white rose from the nosegay in the centre bowl, and all that was left of the marmalade

For to Leslie Long the question whether War was to be or not to be seemed now to have been settled an age ago. The burden of that anxiety was lifted. The other anxieties ahead could be put aside for the present. And she turned, with a tranquil face, to the immediate matter in hand. She was going to take a little tray up to Gwenna, whom she had advised to have her breakfast in bed and not to dress until she should make herself all ready for her wedding at that church at the foot of the hill.

"'Good-morning, Madam Bride!'" said Leslie, smiling, as she came, tray in hand, into the little room where Gwenna was still drowsily curled up against her pillow. "Here's a little bit of sugar for the bird." She sat down on the side of the bed, cutting the dry buttered toast into narrow strips for her chum, taking the top off her egg for her.

"But I won't '*help to salt, help to sorrow*' for you," she went on talking, just a trifle more brightly than naturally. "Curious thing about a wedding, Taff—I mean *one* of the curious things about a wedding, is the wide desire it gives you to quote every aged, half-pay proverb and tag that you've ever heard. '*Marriage is a*——'"

"Not '*lottery*' Leslie! Not that one!" begged the bride-to-be, sitting up and laughing with her mouth full of toast. "We had it four times from Uncle Hugh before we left him last night. '*Few prizes! Many blanks!*'" she quoted joyously. All Monday she had been tremulously nervous. The reaction had come at the right moment.

"'*Happy is the Bride that the sun shines on,*' then," amended Leslie. "You'll be glad to hear it's shining like Billy-oh this morning."

"*I* saw it," said Gwenna, nodding her curls towards

the open casement. "And I shall be getting '*Married in white, sure to be right,*' too!"

The white lingerie frock she was to put on was not new, but it was the prettiest that she had. It lay, folded, crisp as a butterfly's wing and fresh from the wash, on the top of her chest-of-drawers, with the white Princesse slip—that *was* new, bought by her in a hurry the day before!—and the white silk stockings, and the little white suède shoes.

"'*Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue,*'" Leslie capped her quotation. "Where's the '*something blue,*' Taffy?"

"Ribbons in my camisole; and I shall 'borrow' your real lace handkerchief, may I?" said the bride-elect.

"Rather! All that I have, even unto the half of the best-man's attention!" said Leslie, smiling gaily into the cherub face opposite.

But, even as she smiled, she felt that pang which is supposed to be known only to the *man* who sees his chosen pal prepare to be "married and done for."

* * * * * *

For this morning, that turned an adoring sweetheart into a wife, was taking something of her own, of the bridesmaid's youth away.

Gwenna Williams married!

That meant one more girl-chum who would never, never be quite the same again to a once-treasured companion. That bubbling fountain of innocent confidences would now run low, as far as Leslie was concerned. No longer would the elder, quickly-sympathizing, rebellious-tongued girl be the first to hear what happened to her little, ingenuous friend.

The girlish gossip would have a masculine censor to pass.

Leslie could foretell the little scene when it first happened.

She could hear Gwenna's eager, "Oh, Paul! Leslie would so laugh at——" whatever the little incident might be. "I must tell her that!"

Leslie, the bachelor-girl, could imagine the tilt of the young husband's blonde head, and his doubtful, "Don't see why it should be supposed to interest *her*."

She could imagine the little wife's agreeing, "Oh! Perhaps not."

And again the young husband's, "Don't you think Miss Long gets a little bit *much* sometimes? Oh, she's all right, but—I mean, I shouldn't like *you* to go on quite like that."

It would be only after years of marriage that the once-close chum would turn for sympathy to Leslie Long. And then it would not be the same. . . .

The last of Leslie's forebodings seemed the most inevitable. She heard Gwenna's soft Welsh voice, once so full of unexpectedness, now grown almost unrecognizably sedate. She heard it utter that finally "settled-down"-sounding phrase:

"*Say 'how d'you do' nicely to Auntie Leslie, now!*"

Ah! *That* seemed to bring a shadow of Autumn already into the summer sunshine of that bridal room with its white, prepared attire, it's bonnie, bright-eyed occupant. It seemed to show what must some day come: Taffy middle-aged!

Also what probably would come: Taffy matter-of-fact! Taffy with all the dreams out of her eyes! Taffy whose only preoccupations were, "Really that

stair-carpet's getting to look awful; I wonder if I could manage to get a new one and put it on the upper flight?" or, "*I* never saw anything like the way *my* children wear through their boots: it was only the other day I got that quite expensive pair of Peter Pans for little Hughie. And now look at them. *Look!* . . ."

Yes! This sort of change was wrought, by time and marriage and domesticity, in girl after golden girl. Leslie had seen it. She would probably see Taffy, the fanciful Celt, grown stodgy; Taffy, even Taffy, the compactly supple, with all her fruit-like contours, grown *stout!* . . .

Horrible thought. . . .

Then Miss Long gave a protesting shrug of her slim shoulders. This wouldn't do. Come, come! Not on the wedding-morning itself should one give way to thoughts of coming middle-age! The rose, that must, some day, be overblown, was only just a pouting bud as yet. There were days and fragrant days of beauty still before her.

So Leslie picked up her chum's rough towels, her loofah and her verbena-scented soap.

"I'll turn on the bath for you, Taffy, shall I? Hot or cold?"

"Cold, please," said the Welsh girl, springing out of bed and pattering over the oil-cloth to fetch her kimono. "Perhaps to-morrow I shall be able to have a real swim! Oh, won't that be gorgeous?" For the couple had decided upon Brighton for the honeymoon. It was near enough to London in case young Dampier received a summons; yet near also to country-tramps and sea-bathing. "I haven't had

a swim this year, except in the baths. And you can't count that. Oh, *fancy* the sea again, Leslie!"

Leslie could guess what was at the back of that little exultant skip of the younger girl's through the bathroom door. It was sheer innocent delight over the prospect of being able to display to her lover at last something that she did really well.

For they had never been by the sea together, he and she.

And she was a pretty swimmer.

* * * * * *

"Now I'll be your maid for the last time, and fasten you up," said Leslie, when she returned from the bathroom. "I suppose you know there isn't a *single* eye left at the neck of this dress? Always the way with that laundry! It's nothing to *it* that untidiness puts a man off worse than anything else (this from me). Never mind, I'll hook it into the lace. . . . That's all right. '*A bonnie bride is soon buskit.*' Almost a pity the girls will all have gone—though I know you'd hate to have them staring. D'you know, you *are* a little pocket-Venus? No, I'm *not* piling it on. You're lovely, Taffy. I hope the Dampier boy tells you so, very often and much. He's vastly lucky."

"It's me that's lucky," said the girl in all-white devoutly. "Now where's my hat?"

"Do you think you're going to be allowed to get married in a *hat?*"

"My best white one with the wings, I meant."

"Pooh! I've arranged for you to have these," said Leslie, and brought out a cardboard box that she had been to fetch while Gwenna was having her bath.

From it she drew a slender chaplet of dark leaves, with round white buds with waxen flowers.

"Orange-blossoms! *Real* orange-blossoms," cried Gwenna, delightedly sniffing up the sensuous perfume of them. "Oh, but *where* did you get them?"

"Covent Garden. I went down there this morning at five, with one of the housemaids whose young man is at a florist's," explained Leslie, standing above her to set the pretty wreath upon the pretty head. "Now you look like a print of 'Cupid's Coronation,' or something like that. '*Through his curls as the crown on them slips*'—I'll twist this a tiny bit tighter. And here's the veil."

Gwenna stared. "A veil, too, Leslie?"

"Rather. Only chance you get of appearing in this thoroughly becoming kit that carries us all back to the worst days of Women's Enslavement. May as well take that chance!" remarked Miss Long cheerfully, as she shook out soft, transparent folds of finest white net that she herself had embroidered, working late into the night, with a border of leaves in white silk. "This is from me."

"Oh, *Les*-lie! You got it as a surprise for me," said the little bride, much touched. "You worked all these beautiful little laurel-leaves——"

"Not laurel, child. Meant for myrtle. Pity your geography is so weak," rattled on Leslie, as she heard, outside the Club, the stopping of the taxi which had brought the Reverend Hugh Lloyd to call for his detachment of the bridal party. "Refreshingly unconventional sort of wedding you're having in some ways, aren't you? '*The presents were few and inexpensive*' (such a change from the usual report). '*The bride was attended by one bridesmaid: her friend Miss Long, clad in mauve linen, mystic, wonderful*'—(taking into

consideration that it had done her cousin for Henley last year). '*The ceremony proceeded without a hitch, except for the usual attempt on the part of the officiating clergyman to marry the bride to the best man.*' Which must not be, Taffy. You must remember that I've got designs on Mr. Hugo Swayne myself——"

"Don't, Leslie!" protested the bride. "You know I do so hate to think of you getting engaged in that sort of horrible way—instead of just because you can't *help* it! If only there were somebody you could be really in love with——"

"I shall be really rather in love with Uncle Hugh, I know," prophesied the bridesmaid. "*What* a pity he isn't thirty years younger! Come along. He's waiting. I'm going to kiss *him*, anyhow. Got your gloves? Right. Got my hankerfish? You won't *want* to shed any tears into it, but——"

But there was an added brightness in the green-brown eyes of the little bride as she glanced round the girlish room where Leslie would pack up and put everything to rights for her after she had gone.

Impulsively she put her arms round that good chum.

"You've been so—so frightfully sweet to me, Leslie, always. Thanks so awfully——"

"*Don't* kiss me through a veil, my child!" protested Leslie, drawing back. "D'you want to bring me ill luck?"

"Oh, Leslie! I should want to bring you all the good luck in the world," cried the younger girl, earnestly, over her shoulder as they went out. "If I were given three wishes *now* for a wedding-present, one of them would be that you would some day be as happy as me!"

"My dear lamb!" said Leslie lightly, running

downstairs after her, "How do you know I'm not quite as happy in another—in my own way?"

Gwenna shook the curly head under the orange-blossom wreath and the misty veil. It seemed to her that there was only The One Way in which a woman could be happy.

"And the other two wishes?" suggested Leslie, at the sitting-room door. "What are they?"

"Mustn't tell," smiled the little bride of Superstition with her finger at her lips. "If I told they *might* not come true!"

* * * * * *

Very earnestly she hoped that those two wishes might come true. She thought of them again, presently, as she stood, there in church, a small, white-mist-clad figure, backed by the coloured window and the crimson altar. She had the kindly glances upon her of her uncle, of her tall girl-chum, and of Hugo Swayne—who wore a perfect morning coat with a white flower and grey trousers, admirably pressed by his man Johnson. Hugo, but for his Chopin stock, would have looked the very model of a prosperous and conventional bridegroom. He did, in fact, look far more like the popular conception of a bridegroom than did young Paul Dampier in his well-cut but ancient grey tweed suit.

—"The only togs I've got in the wide world," he'd confided to Gwenna, "except working clothes and evening things!"

She stood with her hand in his large, boyish one, repeating in her soft, un-English accent the vows that once seemed to her such a vast and solemn and relentless undertaking.

"*To love, honour, and obey . . . as long as we both shall live. . . .*"

It seemed now so little to have to promise! It seemed only a fraction of all that her heart gave gladly to the lord of it!

"*Till Death us do part,*" she repeated quietly.

And it was then she thought of the two wishes. One was that Paul should be always as much in love with her as he was at that moment.

She was too young fully to realize the greater wisdom of her own second wish.

It was that she herself should always remain as much in love with Paul.

If only God would be very, very kind to them, she thought, and allow just this to be!

* * * * * *

"And you sign your name here," said the clergyman in the vestry to the newly-made husband, who put down in his small neat handwriting, "Paul Dampier, Lieutenant Royal Flying Corps," on the grey-blue sheet, which, duly witnessed and blotted, he was going to tuck away into the breast-pocket of his tweed jacket.

"No. Those marriage lines are not yours," the parson stopped him with a smile. "Those are the property of your wife."

Gwenna, dazed, realized that this referred to herself.

She took the folded marriage-certificate and slipped it into the white satin ribbon girding her pretty frock. She looked very childish for "a wife"! But for that bright wedding-ring on her finger (half a size too large for it) she might have passed for one of the veiled and white-clad First Communicants of an Easter Sunday in Paris. Then she turned up the little face, from

which the veil had been thrown back, to be kissed by the others who had followed them into the vestry. Vaguely she heard Leslie's voice, arranging in murmurs with Hugo Swayne. "No. Perhaps I'll come on afterwards. . . . After I've helped her to change. . . . No; you take Mr. Lloyd and feed him somewhere. No! I'm sure those two won't want to come on to any lunch. Lunch? My dear man! . . . Send them in your car to Victoria and Johnson can bring it back. . . . They'll be getting away at once."

At once! Gwenna looked up into her young husband's blue eyes.

He caught her hand.

"Got you now," he said softly. "Can't run away this time."

By rights she should have walked down the church on his arm. But he did not loose her hand. So it was hand-in-hand, like children, that they hurried out again, ahead of the others, into the sunshine of the porch. The merry breeze took the bride's veil and spread it, a curtain of mist, across the pair of them. Gwenna Dampier caught it aside, laughing gleefully as they stepped out of the porch. The gravity of the service had sparkled into gaiety in their eyes. He crushed her fingers in his. Her heart sang. They would be off——! It was almost too lovely to be true, but——

Yes. It *was* too lovely to be true.

A shadow fell across the path; across the bride's white shoe.

Johnson, Hugo's man, who had been waiting with the car, stepped quickly up to the bridegroom.

"Excuse me, sir, but this message. . . . Came just as you'd gone into church. I waited. The woman brought it on from your rooms, sir."

Paul Dampier took the wire and read it.

The white-frocked girl he had just married stood at the church entrance watching him, while the breeze lifted her veil and stirred her curls and tossed a couple of creamy petals, from her wreath, on to the breast of his coat. She herself stood motionless, stony.

She knew that this was no wire of congratulation such as any bridal couple may expect to receive as they come out of church from their wedding. She knew, even before she heard his deep voice saying—blankly and hurriedly:

"I say. It's from the War Office. I shall have to go. I've got to leave you. Now. I'm ordered to join at once!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM

GWENNA DAMPIER was always to be truly thankful that at that thunderbolt moment of parting at the church door from the lover who had only been her husband for the last quarter of an hour she had been too dazed to show any emotion.

As at the Aviation Dinner she had been numbed by excess of joy, so, now, the shock had left her stony. She knew that she had turned quite a calm little face to the concerned and startled faces of the others as they hurried up to ask what was happening that Paul should be getting into that car alone. It was as quiet and calm to receive Paul's last kiss as he held her strained for a moment almost painfully close to him, muttering, " Take care of yourself, Little Thing."

At the moment it struck her as rather funny, that.

She was to take care of herself ! She, who was just to stay quietly at home, doing nothing. And this was what he told her ; he, who was going off on service, *where*, he himself didn't know. Off, to serve as an Army Aviator, a flyer who swooped above enemy country, to shoot and to be shot at ; every instant in peril of his life.

She even smiled a little as the motor rattled down the hill with him, leaving her to Leslie, and to Uncle Hugh, and to Mr. Hugo Swayne.

She found herself thinking, sedately, that it was a

good thing Paul had got most of his field service equipment yesterday; shopping while she had shopped, while she had bought the white shoes and the silk stockings, the Princesse slip and the handful of other dainty girlish things that had been all the *trousseau* she could collect in such a hurry. Yes, Paul was all ready, she told her friends. She wouldn't see him again before he left London, she expected.

She did not see him again.

That night at the Club, when she was still dazedly quiet—it was Leslie Long who had to swallow lumps in her own throat, and to blink back starting tears from her eyes—that night there arrived the first note of his that had ever been addressed to:

"*Mrs. Paul Dampier.*"

It was scrawled and hurried and in pencil. It began:

"My darling Wife." It told her to address to the War Office until she heard from him, and that she would hear from him whenever he could manage it. It ended up, "*I was so jolly proud of you because you took it like that, you can't think. I always thought you were a sweet Little Thing. I knew you'd be a plucky Little Thing too. Bless you. It's going to be all right.*

"*Your affectionate husband,*

"P. D."

It was Leslie who cried herself to sleep that night; not Gwenna Dampier.

Only gradually the girl came out of the stupor that had helped her, to the realization of what had really happened. He'd gone! She'd been left—without him! But as one source of help disappeared, another came to hand.

It was that queer mixture of feelings that the more enlightened young women at the Club would have called " The conventional point of view."

Miss Armitage at the Club tea-table said to her friends, " Nayowh, I don't consider them at all ' splendid,' as you call it, these girls who go about quite smiling and happily after their husbands have embarked for the War. Saying good-bye without shedding a tear, indeed; and all that kind of thing. Shows they can't *care* much. Heartless! Unsensitive! Callous, I call them."

The art-student with the Trilby hair, who was never quite certain whether she agreed with all Miss Armitage's views or whether she didn't, remarked that really—really anybody who'd seen Miss Williams' face when that young man called for her *couldn't* help thinking that she cared. Most awfully. If *she* didn't make a fuss, it must be because she was rather brave."

" Brive? *I* don't call it that," declared Miss Armitage. " It's just ' the thing to do ' among those people. They've made a regular idol of this stupid, deadening Convention of theirs. They all want to be alike. ' Plucky.' ' Not showing anything.' Pah! I call it crushing out their own individuality for the sake of an ideal that isn't anything very *much*, if you ask me. They all catch it from each other, these wretched Army men's wives. It's no more *credit* to them than it is to some kinds of dogs not to howl when you hold them up by their tiles."

The Trilby art-student put in shyly, " Doesn't that show that they're well bred? "

Miss Armitage, the Socialist, fixing her through her glasses, demanded, " When you sy ' Well bred ' d'you mean the dogs are—or the women that don't cry? "

" Well—both, perhaps," ventured the art-student,

blushing as she helped herself to jam. Miss Armitage, with her little superior smile, gave out, "There's no such thing as well bred, what *you* mean by it. What you mean's just pewer snobbery. The reel meaning of well bred is somebody who is specially gifted in mind and body. Well, all you *can* say of the minds of Army people is that they haven't got any. And I don't know that *I'm* impressed by their bodies."

Here a student of music from the other side of the table said she saw what Miss Armitage meant, exactly. Only, as for Army people, Gwenna Williams couldn't have been called that. Her people were just sort of Welsh Dissenters, awfully *against* soldiers and that kind of thing.

"Doesn't matter. She's the sort of girl who's just like a chameleon: takes all her colour from the man she's supposed to be in love with," said Miss Armitage loftily. "She'll know that she'll never *keep* him unless she's just like the class of women he thinks most of. (As it is, I don't see what that empty-headed girl's got to keep a man *with*.) So, as I say, she'll *suppress* her own identity, and grow the kind 'He' happens to like."

The art-student murmured that she supposed it didn't really *matter*, a girl doing that. Provided that the new "identity" which was "grown to please the man" were a better one than the old.

Miss Armitage the Feminist, sniffed; silent with contempt for this idea. Then she turned again to the student of music, to conclude the summing-up of the new bride's character.

"She'll be positively stimulated and buoyed-up, all the time, by the thought that 'He' considered it plucky of her to go on as if she was quite pleased that he was fighting!" declared the lecturer. "You see!

By and by she'll believe she *is* pleased. She'll catch the whole detestable Jingow spirit, *I* know. Syme attitude of mind as the Zulu who runs amuck at the sound of a drum. Hysterical, that's what *I* call what's at the root of it all ! "

* * * * * *

But whatever Miss Armitage, the Cockney suffragette, chose to call it, it was there, that Spirit.

In those few weeks after the declaration of war it spread and throve over all England. It made Life still worth living, and well worth living, for thousands of anxious sweethearts, and of mothers giving only sons for their country, and of wives who missed closest comrades, and of young widows who had but lately been made brides.

It inspired, through the girl he left behind him, the man who went to war; and thus its influence became part of that subtle but crucial thing which is known as the Moral of an Army, and of an Empire and of a Civilization.

It was, as Leslie Long, the lover of quotations, often quoted to herself in those days:

" The Voice to Kingly boys
To lift them through the fight;
And comfortress of Unsuccess
To give the dead Good-night.

" A rule to trick the arithmetic
Too base of leaguing odds,
The spur of trust, the curb of lust,
The hand-maid of the gods."

* * * * * *

Little Gwenna, the wife who had been left at the church door, took all the help that Spirit gave her.

Two days after her wedding her Uncle Hugh went back to the slate-roofed village that was wedged between those steep, larch-grown Welsh hills. But, though his niece found that this " dreat-ful " old man could be all that was gentle and kind for her, she refused to go home, as he begged her, with him.

She said she must live somewhere where she could " see a little bit of what was going on." She must have some work, real work, to fill her time. She thanked him ; she would let him know directly she felt she could come down to Wales. But just now, please, she wanted nothing but to get back to Mrs. Crewe, her Aeroplane Lady at the Works. She'd go back just as if nothing had happened.

She returned, to find changes at that Aircraft Factory.

CHAPTER IX

THIS SIDE OF "THE FRONT"

THE first of these changes at the Aircraft Works was the sight of the khaki-clad sentry at the entrance.

He was pacing up and down the bit of dusty road outside the shops; and he stopped Gwenna peremptorily, not knowing that she was one of the staff.

She told him, and went on. She found the big central shop in a ferment of activity. Mr. Ryan, striding out on some hurried errand, nearly knocked her over. He called an "Awfully sorry, Miss Gwenna—Mrs. Dampier, I mean," over his shoulder. She saw that his day of dalliance was past, even had she been still "Miss Gwenna." He had less time for Girl, nowadays. The frames of no fewer than four aeroplanes were set up on the stocks; and out of the body of the most-nearly completed one there climbed the slight figure of the Aeroplane Lady. Her blue and youthful eyes lighted up at the sight of the girl standing in the clear, diffused light of the many windows and backed by the spinning shafting.

"Ah! You've arrived, Mrs. Dampier," she said briskly, using the new name without a pause or a smile, for which Gwenna blessed her. "Thank Heaven I

shall have a reliable clerk again. . . . No end of correspondence *now*, my dear. A sheaf of it waiting in the office. Come on and see to it now, will you? And for goodness' sake remind me that I am 'theirs obediently,' instead of merely 'truly,' to the Admiralty. I always forget. If I were left to myself my letters would sound just like the aviator's who wrote to the POWERS-THAT-BE: *'Commander So-and-So presents his compliments and begs respectfully to submit that don't you think it would be a jolly good thing if we started a repairing shop?'*—somewhere or other. Well! Here we are, you see. Stacks of it!" she went on as they reached that office where an airman's sweetheart had first realized the idea that an aeroplane might mean a ship of war—war in the clouds.

"We shall have as much work as we can get through now," said the Aeroplane Lady. "Look at this order from the War Office. And this—and this!"

For to all intents and purposes the War Office and the Admiralty had "taken over" Mrs. Crewe's Aircraft Factory.

The place rang and echoed, long after the hours of the ordinary working man's working day, with the clinking and whirring and hammering of those labours that went to bring forth these great wings of War.

Some of the French mechanics whom Gwenna had known well by sight had disappeared. They had been served with their mobilization papers and were now off to serve under the Tricolour.

One or two of the English fitters, who were Reservists, had rejoined. One had enlisted.

But now, the Aeroplane Lady explained, the enlisting of any more of her men had been discouraged. *They* were too useful where they were. They, with many other sturdy Britons who fretted because they were not

to take up other, riskier work on the other side of the Channel, were kept busy enough preparing the arms which those other, envied men were to use.

It was for the encouragement of them and their fellow-workers in Armament and Ammunition factories that a bundle of blue-lettered posters came down presently to the Works.

Gwenna, once more arrayed in the grey-blue, dope-stiffened pinafore, had the job of pinning up here and there, in the shops and sheds, these notices. They announced to the Man at the Bench that he was as needful to his country as the Man in the Trench. They gave out :

" YOU CAN HIT THE ENEMY AS HARD WITH HAMMER AND RIVET AS YOU CAN WITH RIFLE AND BULLET.

HIT HIM !

HURRY UP WITH THE SHIPS AND GUNS ! "

* * * * * *

And she, too, little Gwenna Dampier, clerk and odd-job-girl, felt herself respond to the appeal. As she typed letters and orders, as she heated dope, as she varnished for the men's handling those huge blue prints with the white, spider's-web-like " working drawings," or as she tested square inches of the fine wing-linen, she felt that she, too, was helping in her way to hurry up with those needed ships and guns.

Was she not lucky in her job ?

For always she was buoyed up by the notion that whatever she touched might be of service, not only to the country which the Beloved was serving, but to the Beloved himself. Who knew ? He himself might have

to fly in any one of these very machines! Every least part, every atom of metal about them bore the visible, indestructible stamp of the English War Office. And Gwenna herself bore that unseen but indelible stamp of her love to her absent lad in every inch of her pliant girl's body, in every thought of her malleable girl's mind.

So the late summer weeks passed as she worked, glad in the thought that any or all of it might be for him. She felt sorry for those women who, when their man is away, have nothing but purely feminine work with which to fill the empty days. Sewing, household cares, knitting. . . . She herself knitted, snatching minutes from the twelve-o'clock dinner-hour in the cottage with Mrs. Crewe to add rows to the khaki woollen cap-comforter that she had started for Paul. It was just a detail in her own busy life. But it struck her that for countless left-behind women this detail remained all that they had to do; to knit all day, thinking, wondering, fretting over the Absent.

"That must be so *awful!* I don't think I should want to *live*," she told the Aeroplane Lady one dinner-hour, "if there wasn't something else really wanted by the men themselves, that I could have to do with! Every soldier's wife," said Gwenna, drawing herself up above the table with a pretty and very proud little gesture which made Mrs. Crewe smile a little, "I think every soldier's wife ought to have the chance of a job in some factory of this sort. Or in a shop for soldiers' comforts, perhaps. Like that woman has in Bond Street where I bought those extra-nice khaki handkerchiefs for Paul. *She's* always thinking out some sort of new 'dodge' for the Front. A new sleeping-rug or trench-boots or something. A woman can feel she's taking some part in the actual campaign then. Don't you think

so, Mrs. Crewe? But there aren't many other things she can do," concluded the girl with that soft, up-and-down accent, "unless she's actually a Red Cross nurse looking after the wounded. There's nothing else."

"Oh, isn't there? Surely——" began the Aeroplane Lady. Then she stopped, with a half-humorous, half-sad little smile in her eyes.

She was going to have suggested that the biggest Job that a woman can achieve has, at the root of things, everything to do with the carrying on of a campaign. Those English workmen in the shops were responsible for the perfect and reliable workmanship of the ships and guns. It was only the women of England who could make themselves responsible for the soundness and reliability of the men of the next generation, their little sons now growing up, to be perhaps the soldiers of the next war. All this flashed through the mind of the Aeroplane Lady, who was also the mother of a fighting airman.

But, on second thoughts, she decided that she would not say anything about it. Not to this cherub-headed, guileless girl who bore Paul Dampier's name, and who wore his glitteringly new wedding-ring on her finger (that is, when she hadn't forgotten it, where it lay in the soap-dish in the bathroom or hanging up on a peg in the Wing-room beside her sunshine-yellow jersey coat. It was, as the newly-married Mrs. Dampier explained, miles too big for her, and she hated getting it a mass of dope).

So, instead of saying what she was going to say, the Aeroplane Lady drank tea out of a workman-like-looking, saucerless Brittany cup with two handles, and presently asked if there were anything exciting that she might be allowed to hear out of the letter that had arrived that morning from Mr. Dampier.

Those eagerly-looked-for, greedily-devoured letters from the young Airman to his wife were uncertain qualities enough.

Sometimes they came regularly, frequently, even two in a day, for Gwenna to kiss, and to learn by heart, and to slip under her pillow at night.

Then for days and weeks there would be nothing from him; and Gwenna would seem to herself to be going about with her flesh holding its breath in suspense all over her body.

That suspense was not (curiously enough) too agonized for his safety.

She had laughed quite easily the day that one of the older workmen had said to her kindly, if tactlessly:

"Ah, Miss Williams—or ma'am, as I s'pose I ought to say—I do feel sorry for you, I do. You here, same as when you was a single young lady. Your young gentleman God knows where, and you knowing that as likely as not you never *will* see him again, p'raps."

"If I were not going to see him again," the girl had said tranquilly, "I should know. I should feel it. And I haven't that feeling at all, Mr. Harris. I'm one of those people who believe in presentiments. And I know I *shall* see him, though I don't know when."

That was the only trouble! When? *When?* When would she have something for her love to live on, besides just messages on lifeless paper?

Paul's letters were sometimes mere hasty scrawls. An "All's well," a darling or so, and his name on a bit of thin ruled paper torn from a note-book and scented vaguely with tobacco. . . .

To-day it was a longer one.

"It's dated four days ago only, and it's just headed 'FRANCE,'" said young Mrs. Dampier, sitting, backed

by the cottage window, with the level Berkshire landscape, flowering now into lines of white tents for the New Army in training, behind her curly head. " He says :

> ' Last week I had a day, if you like ! Engaged with two Taubes in the morning. Machine hit in four places. In the afternoon, as I was up reconnoitring, I saw below me a railway train, immensely long, going along as slow as a slug, with two engines. Sent in my report to Head Quarters, and wasn't believed, if you please. They said there couldn't be a train there. Line was destroyed. However, they did condescend to go and look. Afterwards I was told my report was of the greatest value——'

" There ! Think of that," broke off Gwenna, with shining eyes.

> " ' And it's leaked out now that what I saw was a train crammed with ammunition. Afterwards (same day) went and dropped bombs on some works at—I'd better not say where !—and hope I get to know what damage was done. I know one was a clinking shot. A great game, isn't it ? '

" *Isn't* it ! " murmured the girl who had shuddered so at her first realization of her lover as a possible fighter. But now, after these weeks, she shrank no longer. Gradually she had come to look upon War as a stupendous Adventure from which it would have been cruelty to shut him out. She saw it now as the reward of his years of working, waiting, experimenting. And she said to herself fancifully, " It must be because

I've 'drunk of his cup,' and now I've come to 'think his thoughts.' I don't care what those suffragettes say about losing one's individuality. *I* do think it's a great game!"

She read on:

> "'Got three letters and *Punch* from you in the evening. Thanks awfully. You will write to me all you can, darling, won't you? The little wing is quite safe in my tunic-pocket. Give my love to Mrs. Crewe and to your Uncle and to Leslie Long. Heard from old Hugo that he was actually going to enlist. Do him lots of good.'

"Then he sort of ends up," said Gwenna, dimpling to herself a little over the ending:

("YOUR ALWAYS BOY."),

"and then there's a postscript:

> "'Wouldn't it be top-hole if I could get some leave to come over and fetch the P.D.Q.? Guess the Censor will be puzzled to know who *she* is; who's your lady friend? in fact.
>
> "'P. D.'"

"Thank you, Mrs. Dampier," said the Aeroplane Lady as she rose briskly to return with her assistant to the Works. "Give him my love, too (if I may), when you write. And I should like to tell you to write and ask Leslie Long down to see us one Saturday afternoon," she added as they came through the gap in the dusty hedge to the entrance road. "But really we're too rushed to think of such relaxations as visitors!"

For since Gwenna had come back to the Works neither she nor her employer had taken any sort of holiday. That sacred right of the English worker, the "Saturday half-day off," existed no more at those busy Aircraft Works. Just as if it were any ordinary day of the week, the whistle sounded after the midday rest. And just as if it were any other day of the week, Mrs. Crewe's men (all picked workers, of whom not one happened to be a Trades Unionist) stacked up the bicycles on which they'd ridden back from their meal at home in the near-by town, and trooped into the shops. They continued to hurry up with those ships and guns.

Again the whirring and the chinking and the other forge-like noises would fill the place. Again the quick, achieving movements of clever hands, black and soaked in oil, would be carried on, sometimes until, from the training-camps on the surrounding ugly, useful plains, the bugles had sounded "*Lights Out.*" . . .

CHAPTER X

LESLIE, ON "THE MOTLEY OF MARS"

NOW, as it happened, Miss Leslie Long did not choose to wait for her invitation to the Aircraft Works. Unasked and unexpected, she turned up there the very next Saturday afternoon.

She was given a chair in that spacious, white, characteristically-scented room where Mrs. Crewe and Gwenna were again busy with the wings. She was told not to expect either of them to stop work to look at her, but to go on talking and to tell them if there were anything new going on in London.

"Anything? Why, everything's new," Leslie told them gaily.

She wore the mauve linen frock and the shady hat that had been her bridesmaid's attire for Gwenna's wedding. And she was looking well, Gwenna noticed, as she stole a glance at her chum; well, and happier than she had seen Leslie look since the beginning of this eventful summer.

Leslie then gossiped to them of the many changes in London. These are now very ancient history to a whole nation. But at that time (in September, Nineteen-fourteen) they sounded still strange enough to those who lived out of town.

She spoke of the darkened streets. The bright,

purposely-misleading lights in the Park. Of the recruiting posters; the recruiting results. Of the first of the refugees. Leslie's old lady had given hospitality to two ladies, a mother and a daughter from Brussels, and it was Leslie's new duty to translate English to them. Also of the departure of regiments she talked. . . .

"Of course there are only two classes into which you *can* divide the young men who aren't getting ready to go out," decreed Leslie, the whole-hearted. "Either they're Objects of Pity, or else they're Objects of Contempt."

"Come, come!" put in the Aeroplane Lady, laughing a little, but without raising her eyes from the stretched canvas on the trestles before her. "What about my men outside there?"

"I bet they envy the rawest recruit in K.'s Army!" declared Leslie. "The most anæmic little plucky shop-assistant who's only just scraped through on his chest-measurement and who's never spent so many consecutive hours in the open air in his whole life before!" She patted the stately head of the Great Dane as he stepped up to her from his big wooden kennel in the corner, and went on to say how she loved the New Armies.

"We see plenty of their doings up at Hampstead now, Taffy," she said. "'*The Heath has Armies plenty, and semi-warlike bands!*' Queen's Westminsters coming up in sweaters and shorts to do Physical Ekkers on the cricket-pitch. Swagger young men, some of them, too. Driving up in cars. Wearing their Jermyn Street winter-sports kit of last year under common privates' overcoats."

"Mars in motley!" said the Aeroplane Lady.

Leslie said, "It is a *mixture!* New Army Type

Number One, Section A: the boy who was born to be a soldier and bred to be a clerk. The fighter who wouldn't have got a chance to *live* if it hadn't been for this war. The Dear Duck who's being taken to the water for the first time after twenty years! . . . Then, of course, there's the New Army Type Number Forty-three: the Honest Striver in Khaki, putting his back into learning a job that wasn't ever meant to be his. Not one bit thrilled by the idea of a scrap. No fun to him. Civilian down to his bones. But—*'It is his duty, and he does.'*"

"All the more credit," the Aeroplane Lady reminded her quietly, "to the born civilian."

"Yes, I know, Mrs. Crewe. One thoroughly respects him for it," agreed the soldier's daughter warmly.

Adding meditatively, "But it's rather an effort to *like* him as much as the other kind!"

"Talking of duty, Mr. Grant has gone," said Gwenna as she worked. "You know, Leslie: the engineer at our Westminster place who was always talking to Mabel Butcher and then saying, 'Well! Duty calls. I must away.' I'm *sure* he said that before he went off to enlist. He's in the R.E. And the office-boy that had such an *awful* accent went with him. *He's* in the Halberdiers now; billeted in the country in some garage with six other men."

"How funny! D'you know who one of the men is? My friend, Monty Scott, the Dean's son," said Leslie, laughing again. "You remember him, Taffy, at that dance? He wore that Black Panther get-up. . . . He came up to see me, in uniform, last Sunday. I told him he'd only joined the Halberdiers because he thought the touch of black suited him. Then he told me of his weird billet in the country with these five other men. Two of them had lately come out of

prison, he said ; and they were really awfully interesting, comparing the grub they'd had there with what was served out to them here. I asked him (Monty) how he was getting on. He summed up the lot of the New Ranker rather well, I thought. He said, ' I've *never* been so uncomfortable or laughed so much in my life ' ! "

The Aeroplane Lady, working, said she thought he must be a dear.

" He is, rather," agreed the girl who had thrice refused to marry this young man.

" Why d'you sigh ? " asked Gwenna quickly. A sigh meant, to her, only one thing. Impatience over the absence of the Beloved !

" I—perhaps I was thinking of Monty Scott's eyes," said Leslie lightly, bending over to smooth the dog's neck. " They *are* so absurdly handsome. *Such* a pity one can't have them to wear as brooches ! " Then, quickly, she turned from the subject of Monty Scott. She drew something out of her black silk bag. A picture postcard.

" From one of our Allies," said Leslie, showing it.

It gave a view of a French Regiment, still wearing the picturesque uniform of Eighteen-seventy, marching down a sunny, chestnut-bordered boulevard. The soldier in the immediate foreground showed under the jaunty *képi* a dark, intelligent, mobile face that Gwenna recognized.

She sighed and smiled over the card. It brought back to her that tea at Hugo Swayne's rooms with Leslie, and the tall, blonde Englishman who was to be her husband, and that dark young French engineer who had said, " But the Machine is also of the sex of Mademoiselle ! " He had written on this card in sprawling French writing and blue French ink, " *À*

Mademoiselle Langue. Salutation amicale. Remember, please, the private soldier Gaston, who carries always in his knapsack the memory of the Curate's Egg!"

"Fancy, two of the men who were at Mr. Swayne's that afternoon are off at the Front to-day," said Gwenna Dampier. "That is, all three, perhaps. Paul said something about his cousin enlisting."

"Poor Hugo Swayne," said Leslie, with a laugh, that she stopped as if she were sorry she had begun it. "It's too bad, really."

"What is? *Isn't* he enlisting?"

"Yes. Oh yes, Taffy, he has. But merely enlisting isn't the whole job," said Leslie. "He—to begin with, he could hardly get them to pass him——"

"Why? Too fat?" asked Gwenna mercilessly.

"Fat—Oh no. They said three weeks' Swedish exercise *and* drill would take that off. He was quite fit, they said, physically. It was his *mental* capacity they seemed to doubt," explained Leslie. "Of course that was rather a shock to Hugo to hear, after the years he's been looking up to himself as a rather advanced and enlightened and thinking person. However, he took it very well. He saw what they meant."

"Who were 'they'?" asked Mrs. Crewe.

"The soldier-men he went to first of all, old brother-officers of his father's, who'd been with his father in Egypt, and whom he asked to find him a job of some sort. They told him, quite gently, of course, that they were afraid he was not 'up' to any soldiering job. They said they were afraid there were heaps of young Englishmen like him, awfully anxious to 'do their bits,' but simply *not clever enough!* (Rather nice, isn't it, the revenge, at last, of the Brainless Army Type on the Cultured Civilian?) And he said to the

old Colonel or General or whatever it was, 'I know, sir. I see, sir. Yes, I suppose I have addled myself up by too much reading and too much talk. I know I'm a Stage-Society-and-Café-Royal rotter, and no earthly good at this crisis.' And then he turned round and said quite angrily, 'Why wasn't I brought up to be some use when the time came?' And the old soldier-man said quite quietly, 'My dear Swayne, none of you 'enlightened' people believed us that there was any 'time' coming. You see now that we were right.' And Hugo said, 'You ought to have hammered it into me. Isn't there anything that I can do, sir?' And at last they got him something."

"What?" demanded Gwenna.

"Well, of course it sounds *rather* ludicrous when you come to say what it is," admitted Leslie, her mouth curling into a smile that she could not suppress. "But it just shows the Philistines that there *is* some use (if not beauty) in Futurist painting, after all. One always knew '*there must be something, if one could but find it out.*'"

"But your friend Mr. Swayne can't do Futurist paintings," objected the Aeroplane Lady, "at the Front!"

"Well, but that's just what he *is* doing! He's in France; at Quisait. Painting motor-buses to be used for transport wagons," explained Leslie. "You know the most disguising colour for those things at a distance is said to be not khaki, or feld-grau, or dull green, or any other *single* colour. You have to have a sort of heather-mixture of all the most brilliant colours that can be got! This simply makes the thing invisible a certain way off. It's the idea of the game-feather tweed on the moors, you know. So Hugo's using his talents by painting emerald-green and magenta

and scarlet and black triangles and cubes and splodges all over those big Vanguards——"

"Why, *I* could do that," murmured the girl who was so busy varnishing the aeroplane wings. "Sure I could."

"Oh, but, Taffy, you haven't been educated up to it," protested Leslie gravely. "You *couldn't* get it sufficiently dynamic and simultaneous and marinetic!"

A message from the Central Shop to the Aeroplane Lady left the two girls alone presently in the Wing-room. Then Leslie, putting her hand on the rounded arm below the loose sleeve of Gwenna's working-pinafore, said softly and quickly, "Look here. I came down because I had something to tell you, Taffy."

The Welsh girl glanced quickly up into her chum's black eyes.

"Something to tell me?" Gwenna's heart sank.

She didn't want to hear of Leslie having definitely made up her mind at last to marry a—well, a man who was good-natured and well bred and generous enough about wedding-presents, but who confessed himself to be of "no earthly good" when "it came to the real things of life." "Oh, Leslie, is it——"

"It is that you can congratulate me."

"Oh, dear. I was *afraid*—You mean you *are* engaged to him, Leslie. To Mr. Swayne."

"No," said Leslie, holding her black head high. "No, not to Mr. Swayne. Why must 'congratulations' always mean 'Mister' Anybody? They don't, here. I mean you can congratulate me on coming to see reason. I know, now, that I mustn't think of marrying him."

Gwenna drew a big breath of relief.

She laid her dope-thickened brush carefully down in the tin, and clapped her little sticky hands.

"I'm *so* thankful," she cried childishly. "It wouldn't have done, Leslie!"

"No," said Miss Long.

"He wasn't a quarter good enough."

"Pooh. What's *that* got to do with caring? Nothing," declared Leslie, tilting her loose-limbed, mauve-clad figure back on the chair that Paul Dampier had sat in, the day before the Aviation Dinner. "It's caring that counts."

"Haven't I *always* been saying so?" said Gwenna earnestly as she took up her brush again. "Not just because I'm a happily-married woman myself, my dear."

Here she drew herself up with the same little gesture of matronly dignity that had made Mrs. Crewe smile. It forced Leslie to bite her lips into gravity. And Paul Dampier's girl concluded innocently, "*I've* always known how much Love means. What's *money?*"

"Nothing to run down, I assure you. Money's gorgeous. Money means *Power*," affirmed Leslie. "Apart from the silk-stockinged aspect of it, it lets you live a much fuller life mentally and spiritually. It can make you almost everything you want to be to yourself and to other people, Taff. It's worth almost anything to get it. But there's one thing it's not worth," said Leslie Long, really gravely. "*It's not worth marrying the wrong person for.*"

"I don't know why you didn't know that *before*," said little Gwenna, feeling for once in her life *so* much older and much wiser than her chum. "What makes you know it now, Leslie?"

"The War, perhaps. Everything's put down to

the War nowadays. . . . But it has simplified things. One knows better what's what. What one must keep, what one can throw overboard," said Leslie Long. "Everything is changed."

Gwenna thought for a moment of telling her that one thing did not change. Love!

Then she thought that that was not quite true, either. In its own way Love, too, was changed by this War.

"There's *more* of it!" thought Gwenna simply.

For had not her own love to her absent lover burned with more steady a flame within her ever since the morning when she had seen him depart to take his own share in the struggle? And so she guessed it must be with many a girl, less ardently in love than she had been, but now doubly proud of her man—and her soldier. She thought of the other hurried War-bridals and betrothals all over the country. She thought of the gentler voice and manner that she had noticed between the husbands and wives among the cottagers down here. They realized, perhaps, how many couples were being swept apart by War. Yes, this thought seemed to give Man and Woman an added value in the eyes of each other, Gwenna thought. She thought of the gradual disappearance of the suffragette type with her indictments against Man. She thought of the new courtesy with which every woman and girl seemed to be treated in streets and tubes and omnibuses by every man who wore the livery of War.

Of the two things greater than all things in this world, one fulfilled the other. And, because War was in the world again, it was bringing home undeniably to man and maid alike that "*the first is Love.*"

Then Gwenna sighed from her heart.

How long? How much longer would it be before she could see her own lover again?

CHAPTER XI

A LOVE-LETTER—AND A ROSE

A COUPLE of days after Leslie's visit Gwenna was moving about the bedroom at Mrs. Crewe's cottage.

It was an old-fashioned, quaintly pretty room. The low ceiling, on which the lamplight gleamed, was crossed by two sturdy black oak beams. Straw-matting covered the uneven floor, and the wall-paper was sprinkled with a pattern of little prim posies in baskets. The chintz of the casement-curtains showed flowering sprays on which parrots perched; there was a patch-work quilt on the oaken bed.

Gwenna had come up early; it was only nine o'clock. So, having undressed and got into her soft white ruffled night-gown and her kimono of pink cotton-crêpe, she proceeded to indulge in one of those "bedroom potterings" so dear to girlhood's heart.

First there was a drawer to be tidied in the dressing-table that stood in the casement-window. Ribbons to be smoothed out and rolled up; white embroidered collars to be put in a separate heap. Next there was the frilling to be ripped out of the neck and sleeves of her grey linen dress, that she had just taken off, and to be rolled up in a little ball, and tossed into the waste-

paper basket. Then, two Cash's marking-tapes with her name, GWENNA DAMPIER, to be sewn on to the couple of fine, Irish linen handkerchiefs that had been brought down to her as a little offering from Leslie. Then there was her calendar to be brought up to date; three leaves to tear off until she came to the day's quotation:

"Don't call the score at half-time."

Then there was the last button to sew on to a filmy camisole that she had found leisure, even with her work and her knitting, to make for herself. Gradually, young Mrs. Dampier meant to accumulate quite a lot of "pretties" for the Bottom Drawer, that Ideal which woman never utterly relinquishes. The house and furniture of married life Gwenna could let go without a sigh. "The nest"—pooh! But the ideal of "the plumage" was another matter. Even if the trousseau did have to come after the wedding, never mind! A trousseau she would have by the time Paul came home again.

Having finished her stitching, she put her little wicker-work basket aside on the chest-of-drawers and took out the handkerchief-sachet in which she kept all his letters. She read each one over again. . . . "I'll finish mine to him to-night," she decided. "It'll go off before eight in the morning, then; save a post."

From under her work-basket she took her blotting-pad. The letter to Paul was between the leaves, with her fountain-pen that she'd used at school. She sat down in the wicker-seated chair before the dressing-table and leaned her pad up against the edge of that table, with her brushes and comb, her wicker-cased bottle of eau-de-Cologne, her pot of skin-cream and her oval hand-mirror, its silver back embossed by Reynolds'

immortal group of cherubs whose curly heads and soft, tip-tilted faces were not unlike Gwenna's own as she sat there, reading over what she had already put in that letter to the Front.

It began in what Gwenna considered an admirably sedate and old-fashioned style: "*My dearest Husband.*" She thought: "The Censor, whoever he is! that Paul talks about—when he reads that he'll think its from somebody quite old and been married for ten years, perhaps; instead of only just—what is it—seven weeks!"

It went on to acknowledge the last note from Paul and to ask him if she should send him some more cigarettes, and to beg that he would, if he could possibly, possibly manage it, get one of his friends to take a snapshot of him—Paul—in uniform, as Gwenna had never yet seen him.

Beside the swung oval mirror on the dressing-table there was set up in a silver frame the only portrait that she possessed of her boy-husband: the glazed picture postcard that Gwenna had bought that Saturday in May, when she had gone to see the flying at Hendon with her two friends from the Westminster Office, Mabel Butcher and Ottilie Becker.

Gwenna's eyes fell on that photograph as she raised them from her pad. Her thoughts, going back to that afternoon, suggested the next item to be written to Paul.

And the young girl wrote on, in much the same style as she would have talked, with few full stops and so much underlining that some words seemed to have a bar of music below them.

"You remember my telling you about Miss Becker, the German girl that I used to be at Westminster with,

when we used to call ourselves the Butcher, the Baker, and the Candlestick-maker ? Well, what *do* you think ? She has been *taken away* from her boarding-house where she was in Bloomsbury, and interned in some camp as an alien enemy, although she is a girl, and they say she *nearly* was just on trial *as a spy !*

" Mabel Butcher wrote and told me about it. She (Miss Butcher) went with Ottilie Baker when she had to register herself as an alien at Somerset House, just after the War broke out, and she said it was *awful*, a great place like six National Galleries rolled into one, and *miles* of immense long corridors, and *simply crowds* of all kinds of Germans and Austrians, just like a queue at the theatre, waiting to be registered, and all looking scared to *death*, quite a lot of pretty girls among them, too.

" Poor Ottilie Becker cried like anything at having to go, and to be an enemy alien, you know she'd got such heaps of friends in England and liked lots of English ways. She used to have a bath every morning, even. I hate to think of *her* being a prisoner. Of course I know one ought to feel that all Germans ought to be wiped out now," wrote Gwenna, " but it makes you feel sort of different when it's a girl you've *known* and had lots of little jokes with, and I was with her the very first time I heard of *you*, so I shan't be able to help always feeling a little kinder about her.

" The reason she was arrested was because they found in her room at the boarding-house a lot of notes about the engineering-works, our works, which she had been going to send off to that soldier-brother of hers, Karl. She declared *she* didn't know she wasn't supposed to, and that she hadn't an *idea* of our going to War with her country or anything, and I'm *sure* she didn't *mean* any harm at all. She said she'd seen her brother Karl in

England the week before War was declared, and that *he* hadn't said a word to her then. And so perhaps he *was* that waiter all the time. You know, the one we saw, in the cab that last Sunday of peace-time. I expect *he* is fighting us now, isn't it *extraordinary?*"

This was the end of the sheet. Gwenna took another. Her letters to the Front were always at least six times as long as the answers that she received to them, but this was only to be expected. And Paul had said he loved long letters and that she was to tell him absolutely everything she could. All about herself.

She went on:

"You tell me to take care of myself and not to work too hard, well, I am not. And I am quite well and Mrs. Crewe is most *awfully* kind to me, and the little maid here *spoils* me. Every night when I am in bed she *insists* on bringing me up a glass of hot milk and two biscuits, though what for I don't know.

"*Is* there anything more about your coming back from the Front to fetch the P.D.Q.? Oh, it *would* be so lovely to see you even for a *few days*. I sometimes feel as if I had *never, never* seen you——"

She sighed deeply in the quiet, lamp-lit room, where the chintz-casement curtains stirred faintly above the open window. It had been so long, so long, all this time of being without him. Why, she had scarcely had a week of knowing him hers, before there had come that rushed War-bridal and the Good-bye! And all she had to live on were her memories and a glazed picture postcard, and a packet of pencil-scrawled letters of which the folds were worn into slits. She couldn't even write to him as she would have wished.

Always there brooded over her that spectre "The Censor," who possibly read every letter that was addressed to a man at the Front. Gwenna knew that some people at home wrote anything they wished, heedless that a stranger's eye might see it. Leslie, for instance, wrote to one of her medical students, now working with the R.A.M.C. in Paris, as "My dear Harry—and the Censor," adding an occasional parenthesis: "*You won't understand this expression, Mr. Censor, as it is merely a quite silly family joke!*" She, Gwenna, felt utterly unable to write down more than a tithe of the tender things that she would have liked to say. To-night she had a longing to pour out her heart to him . . . oh, and she would say *something!* Even if she tore up that sheet and wrote another. She scribbled down hastily: "Darling boy, do you know I miss you more *every day;* nobody has *ever* missed anybody *so dreadfully.*"

Here she was wrong, though she did not know it. It was true that she longed hungrily for the sight of that dear blonde face, with its blue, intrepid eyes, for the sound of that deep and gentle voice, and for the touch of those hands, those strongly modelled lips. But all these things had been a new joy, scarcely realized before it was gone. She would have told you that it made it worse for her. Actually it meant that she was spared much. Her lover's presence had been a gift given and snatched away; not the comradeship of years that, missing, would seem even as the loss of a limb to her. The ties of daily habit and custom which strengthen that many-stranded cord of Love had not yet been woven between these two lovers.

"I sometimes think it was really *awfully selfish* of me to *marry* you,"

Gwenna wrote, thinking to herself, " oh, bother that old Censor, just for once." She went on more hurriedly :

" You might have married somebody like that Miss Muriel Conyers, with those frightfully lovely clothes and *all* her people able to help you on in the Army, or somebody very beautiful and *rich*, anybody would have been glad to have you, and I *know* I am just a little *nobody*, and not a bit clever and even Leslie used to say I had a Welshy accent sometimes when I speak, and I daresay *lots* of people will think, oh, ' how *could* he !— why, she isn't even very *pretty !* ' "

She raised her eyes, deeper and brighter in the lamp-light, and gave a questioning glance at her reflection in the oval, swung mirror on the dressing-table at which she wrote. It would have been a captious critic indeed that could have called her anything less than very pretty at that moment ; with her little face flushed and intent, a mixture of child and woman in the expression of her eyes and about her soft, parted lips Above the ruffle of her night-gown her throat rose proudly ; thick and creamy and smooth. She remembered something he'd told her that afternoon at Kew. He'd said that she always reminded him of any kind of white flower that was sturdy and sweet ; a posy of white clover, a white, night-blooming stock, some kinds of white roses. . . . She would like to send him a flower, in this letter, to remind him.

She glanced towards the open casement, where the curtain waved. Under the shading foliage of the clematis that grew up to the cottage-roof there had climbed the spray of a belated rose. " Rose Ménie " was its name. Mrs. Crewe had said that it would not flower that year. But there was one bud, half-hidden by

leaves, swelling on its sappy twig, close to Gwenna's window-sill.

"It'll come out in a day or so," Gwenna thought. "I'll send it to him, if it comes out white. . . . *He* was pleased with my looks!"

So, reassured, she turned to the letter again, and added:

"The only thing is, that whatever sort of wife you'd married, they *couldn't* have loved you like I do, or been so proud of being your wife, *really* sometimes I can *hardly believe* that I am really and truly married to——"

She broke off, and again lifted her curly head from bending above the paper.

There had been a light tap at the door behind her.

"Come in," called Gwenna, writing down as she did so, "here is the little maid coming to bring me up my hot milk; now, darling, darling boy, I *do hope* they give you enough to eat wherever you are——"

Behind her the white door opened and shut. But the maid did not appear at Gwenna's elbow with the tray that held that glass of hot milk and the plate of biscuits. The person who had entered gazed silently across the quiet girlish room at the little lissom figure clad in that soft crumple of pink and white, sitting writing by the dressing-table, at the cherub's head, backed by the globe of the lamp that spun a golden aureole into that wreath of curls.

There was a pause so long that Gwenna, wondering, raised her head.

She gave another glance into the oval mirror that stood on the dressing-table just in front of her
And there she saw, not the homely, aproned figure of

the little maid that she had expected to see, but the last thing that she had expected.

It was a picture like, and unlike, a scene she had beheld long, long ago, framed in the ornate gold-bordered oval mirror in the drawing-room at the Smiths'. Over her pink-clad shoulder, she saw reflected a broad, khaki-covered chest, a khaki sleeve, a blonde boy's face that moved nearer to her own. Even as she sat there, transfixed by surprise, those blue and intrepid eyes of Icarus looked, laughing joyously, full into hers, and held her gaze as a hand might have held her own.

"It's only me," said a deep and gentle voice, almost shyly. "I say——"

"*You!*" she cried, in a voice that rang with amazement, but not with fright; though he, it seemed, was hurrying out hasty warnings to the Little Thing not to be frightened. . . . He'd thought it better than startling her with a wire. . . . Mrs. Crewe had met him at the door . . . he'd come straight up: hoped she didn't think he was a ghost—— Not for a second had she thought so!

Instantly she had known him for her granted and incarnate heart's desire, her Flyer, home from the Front, her husband to whom she had that moment been writing as she sat there.

She sprang to her feet.

She whirled round.

She could not have told whether she had first flung herself into those strong arms of his, or whether he had snatched her up into them.

All that mattered was that they were round her now, lifting and holding her as though they would never let her go again.

When réveillé sounded from the Camp on the plain,

the sun was bright on that clematis-grown wall outside the window of Gwenna's bridal-room.

It gilded the September foliage about the window-sill. It also touched a gem of passionate colour, set among the leaves of the Rose Ménie.

That red rose had broken into blossom in the night.

PART III

SEPTEMBER, NINETEEN-FOURTEEN

CHAPTER I

A WAR-TIME HONEYMOON

THE morning after Paul Dampier's arrival from the Front he and his wife started off on the honeymoon trip that had been for so many weeks deferred.

They motored from the Aircraft Works to London, where they stopped to do a little shopping, and where Gwenna was in raptures of pride to see the effect produced by the Beloved in the uniform that suited him so well.

For every passer-by in the street must turn to look, with quickened interest now, at an Army Aviator. Even the young men in their uniforms gave a glance at the soldier whose tunic buttoned at the side and whose cap had the tilt that gave to the shape of his blonde head something bird-like, falcon-like. And every girl in the restaurant where they lunched murmured, "Look," to her companion, "that's someone in the Royal Flying Corps," and was all eyes for that kit which, at a time when all khaki was romantic, had a special, super-glamour of its own.

But the blue eyes of the man who wore it were for no one but the girl with whom he was taking his first meal alone together since they had been man and wife. Her own glance was still hazy with delight.

Oh, to see him there facing her, over the little round table set in a corner!

They ate cold beef and crusty loaf and cheese in memory of their first lunch together in that field, long ago. They drank cider, touching glasses and wishing each other all luck and a happy life.

"And fine weather for the whole of our week's honeymoon," added the bridegroom as he set down his glass. "Lord, I know how it *can* pour in your Wales."

For it was to Wales that they went on by the afternoon train from Euston; to Gwenna's home, arriving late that evening. The Reverend Hugh Lloyd was away on a round of preaching-visits about Dolgelly. They had his black-henlike housekeeper to chirp and bustle about them with much adoring service; and they would have the Chapel House to themselves.

"But we won't be *in* the house much," Gwenna decided, "unless it pours."

It did not pour the next morning. It was cloudless and windless and warm. And looking round on the familiar landscape that she had known when she was a little child, it seemed now to Gwenna as if War could not be. As if it were all a dream and a delusion. There was no khaki to be met in that little hillside village of purple slate and grey stone. Only one or two well-known figures were missing from it. A keeper from one of the big houses on the other side of the river, and an English chauffeur had joined the colours, but that nine-days' wonder was over now. Peace had made her retreat in these mountain fastnesses that had once echoed to the war-shouts and the harp-music of a race so martial.

It was the music that had survived. . . .

Paul Dampier had put on again that well-known

and well-worn grey tweed jacket of his, so that he also no longer recalled War. He had come right away from all that, as she had known he would; come safely back to her. Here he was, with her, and with a miracle between them, in this valley of crystal brooks and golden bracken and purple slopes. It was meant that they two should be together thus. Nothing could have stopped it. She felt herself exulting and triumphing over all the Fates who might have tried to stop it; and over all the Forces that might have tried to keep him from her. His work on the Machine? Pooh! That had actually helped to bring them together! The Great War? Here he was, home from the War!

"I've always, always wanted to be with you in the real country, and I never have," she told him, as together they ran down the slate steps of Uncle Hugh's porch after breakfast and turned up a path between the sunny larch-grown steeps. That path would be a torrent in the winter time. Now the slate pebbles of it were hot under the sun. "I don't really count that *country*, that field, that day——"

"Didn't seem to mind it when we were there," he teased her as he walked beside her swinging the luncheon basket that Margaret had put up for them. "I mean of course when *I* was there."

Gwenna affected to gasp over the conceit of men. "If I've *got* to be with one," she told him as if wearily, "I'd rather it was in a nice place for me to listen to his nonsense."

"Wasn't any 'nonsense,' as you call it, in that field."

"No," agreed Gwenna, "there wasn't."

He looked sideways and down at her as she climbed that hill-path, hatless, sure-footed and supple. Then

a narrow turn in the path made her walk a little ahead of him. She was wearing a very simple little sheath of a grey cotton or muslin or something frock, with a white turn-down collar that he hadn't seen her in before, he thought. Suited her awfully well. (Being a man, he could not be expected to recognize it for the grey linen that she'd had on when he'd come upon her that afternoon, high up on the scaffolding at Westminster.)

"Yes, though, there was 'nonsense,'" he said, now suddenly answering her last speech. "Fact of the matter is, it was dashed nonsense to waste such a lot of time."

"Time, how?" asked Gwenna guilelessly, without turning her head.

"Oh! As if you didn't know!" he retorted. "Wasting time talking about the Machine, to you. Catching hold of your hand, to show you what the camber was—and then letting it go! Instead of owning up at once, '*Yes. All right. You've got me. Pax!*' And starting to do this——"

He was close up behind her now on the mountain-path, and because of the steep ground on which they stood, her head was on a higher level than his own. He drew it downwards and backwards, that brown, sun-warmed head, to his tweed-clad shoulder.

"You'll break my neck. I know you will, one day. You are so *rough*," complained Gwenna; twisting round, however, and taking a step down to him.

"I love you to be," she whispered. She kissed his coat-lapel. All the red of that rose bloomed now on her mouth. . . . They walked on, with his arm a close, close girdle about her. The luncheon basket was forgotten on the turfy slope on which he'd dropped it. So they lunched, late, in the farm-house four

hundred feet above the Quarry village. It was a lonely place enough, a hillside outpost, fenced by stunted damson trees; a short slate-flagged end of path led to the open door where a great red baking crock stood, full of water. Inside, the kitchen was a dark, cool cave, with ancient, smooth-worn oaken furniture that squeaked on the slate-slabbed floor, with a dresser rich with willow-pattern and lustre, and an open fire-place, through which, looking up, they could see through the wood smoke a glimpse of the blue sky.

And in this sort of place people still lived and worked as if it were Seventeen Hundred and Something—and scarcely a day's journey away was the Aircraft Factory where people lived for the work that will remake the modern world; oh, most romantic of all ages, that can set such sharp contrasts side by side!

An old Welshwoman, left there by her sheep-farming sons at home in the chimney corner, set butter-milk before the lovers, and ambrosial home-churned butter, and a farm-house loaf that tasted of nuts and peat-smoke. They ate with astonishing appetites; Gwenna sitting in the window-seat under the sill crowded with flower-pots and a family Bible. Paul, man-like, stood as near as he could to the comfort of the fire even on that warm day. The old woman, who wore clumping clogs on her feet and a black mutch-cap on her head, beamed upon the pair with smiles as toothless and as irresistible as those of an infant.

"You must have a plenty, whatever," she urged them, bringing out another loaf, of *bara breeth* (or currant bread). "Come on, Sir! Come, Miss Williams, now. Mam, I mean. Yess, yess. You married lady now. Your husband," with a skinny

hand on his grey sleeve, "your husband is *not* a minnyster?"

"He's a soldier, Mrs. Jones," explained Gwenna, proudly, and with a strengthening of her own accent, such as occurs in any of her race when revisiting their wilds. "He's an Airman."

"Ur?" queried Mrs. Jones, beaming.

"He goes flying. You know. On a machine. Up in the sky."

"Wel, *oh!*" ejaculated the old woman. And laughed shrilly. To her this was some eccentric form of English joke. Flying? Like the birds! *Dear*, dear. "What else does he do, *cariad fâch?*" she asked of Gwenna.

"He's been over in France, fighting the Germans," said the girl, while the old woman on her settle by the fire nodded her mutched head with the intense, delighted expression of some small child listening to a fairy story. It was indeed no more, to her. She said, "Well, indeed. He look a very *kind* one, too." Then she added, "I not much English. Pitty, pitty!" and said something in Welsh at which Gwenna coloured richly and laughed a little and shook her head.

"What's she say?" demanded Paul, munching; but his girl-wife said it was nothing—and turned her tip-tilted profile, dark against the diamond window panes, to admire one of the geranium plants in the pots.

Afterwards, when the couple were outside again in the fresh sunlight on the mountain lands, young Dampier persisted with his questioning about what that old woman had said. He betted that he could guess what it was all about. And he guessed.

Gwenna admitted that he had guessed right.

"She said," she told him shyly, "that it ought to be 'a very pretty one, whatever.'"

"I've got a very pretty present for it," Paul whispered presently.

"What?"

"Don't you remember a locket I once took? A little mother-of-pearl heart," he said. "That's what I shall keep it for——"

And there fell a little silence between them as they walked on, swinging hands above the turf, gravely contented.

They had *had* to spend the day together thus. It seemed to Gwenna that all her life before had been just a waiting for this day.

Below the upland on which they swung along, grey figures on the green, there lay other wide hill-spaces, spread as with turf-green carpets, on which the squares of mellowing, golden-brown autumn woods seemed rugs and skins cast down; below these again stretched the further valley with the marsh, with the silver loops and windings of the river, and the little white moving caterpillar of smoke from the distant train. There was also a blue haze above the slate roofs of a town.

But here, in this sun-washed loneliness far above, here was their world; hers and his.

They walked, sometimes climbing a crest where stag's-horn moss branched and spread through the springy turf beneath their feet, sometimes dipping into a hollow, for two miles and more. They could have walked there for half a day and seen no face except that of a tiny mountain sheep, cropping among the gorse; heard no voice but those of the calling plovers, beating their wings in the free air. Then, passing a gap in two hills, they came quite suddenly upon the cottage and the lake.

The sheet of water, silent, deserted, reflected the

warm blue of the afternoon sky and the deep green of the overhanging boughs of great hassock-shaped bushes that covered two islands set upon its breast.

"Rhododendron bushes. When they're in blossom they're all simply *covered* with flowers, pink and rose-colour, and reflected in the water! It *is* so lovely," Gwenna told the lover beside her. "Oh, Paul! You *must* come here again and see that with me in the spring!"

On the further bank was another jungle of rhododendron and lauristinus, half-hiding the grey stone walls and the latticed windows of the square cottage, a fishing box of a place that had evidently been built for someone who loved solitude.

Paul Dampier peered in through one of the cobwebby lattices. Just inside on the sill there stood, left there long since, a man's shaving-tackle. Blue mildew coated the piece of soap that lay in the dish. Further in he caught a glimpse of dusty furniture, of rugs thrown down on a wooden floor, of a man's old coat on a peg. A wall was decorated with sets of horns, with a couple of framed photographs, with old fishing-rods.

"Make a jolly decent billet, for someone, this," said Paul.

Gwenna said, "It belongs to some people. . . . They're away, I think. It's all locked up now. So's the boat for the lake, I expect. They used to keep a boat up here for fishing."

The long flat boat they found moored to one of the stout-trunked rhododendron bushes that dipped its pointed leaves in the peat-brown water fringed with rushes.

Paul stepped in, examining her, picking up the oars.

"Nice afternoon for a row, Ma'am?" he said,

smiling up at the girl clad in dove-grey on the rushy bank, with the spongy dark-green moss about her shoes.

"Jump in, Gwenna. I'll row you across the lake."

"You can't row that old tub, boy."

"Can't I?"

"I'll race you round, then!"

"Right you are!"

The girl skipped round the clump of rhodos that hid the last flicker of her skirt; and the boy bent to the short, home-made sculls.

The boat was a crank, unhandy little craft; and lacked thole-pins on one side. Therefore Gwenna, swift-footed Little Thing that she was, had as good a chance of winning as he.

"Like trying to row a bucket!" he laughed, as the boat spun. "Hi, Gwen! I ought to have some start, you know!"

He rowed. Presently he rested on his oars and called, "Hullo, have you started?"

"Started—" came back only the echo from the cottage roof. There was no sign of any grey-frocked running figure on the bank. He scanned it on both sides of him, gave a look towards each of those shrub-covered islands on the smooth expanse.

"Gwenna—Why, where are you? What's become of the girl," he muttered. "Gwen-na!"

She was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUL OF UNDINE

"HUL—*LO!*" he shouted. The echo answered as he sat in the boat staring about him. . . .

Then he felt a twitch at one of his sculls. It turned in his hand; was wrenched from him.

"What the deuce——" he began, surprised.

Then he heard a laugh.

"What on earth——"

It was nothing on earth that had greeted him. It was something of the water that laughed up into his face and called, "Hullo, husband!"

A mermaid, a water-nymph, a little white-shouldered Undine was peeping up and mocking him! She trod water, turned over on her side, swam with easy strokes.

For always Gwenna had been proud of her swimming.

She had won a medal for it at that Aberystwyth school of hers; but she wanted more than a mere medal for it now. She wanted her boy to see her swimming, and to praise her stroke. She had looked forward to that. She wanted to show him that she could make as graceful movements with her own body in the water as he could make with his biplane in the air. She could! He should see! She made these movements. She had thought of making them—just *so*—on the morning of her marriage. Only then she had thought it would be in the sea off Brighton beach,

with whole crowds of other stupid people about in dark-blue or Turkey-red "costumes." Here it was so much lovelier; a whole mountain-side and a clear lake to herself in which to show off her pet accomplishment to her lover. She was one innocent and pretty Vanity incarnate as she glided along beside his boat. She gave a quick twist. There was a commotion of translucent amber water, a gleam of coral white that shaded down into peaty brown as she dived, reappearing on the other side of the boat, looking up at him, blinking as her curls streamed water into her eyes.

His eyes, blue and direct and adoring, were upon her.

"I say," he said admiringly, "I didn't know you could *swim* like that. Jolly!"

This moment of achievement was possibly the most exquisite in the whole of Gwenna's life.

Shaking the wet from her hair, she laughed with pure, completed, rapturous joy; glorying in her youth, in the life that charged each little blue vein of her, in this power of swimming that she felt had been given her only to please him.

"Why, I could swim you to—Oh! Mind you don't upset!" she exclaimed.

For Paul had stooped; leaning over the side of the boat he had passed one arm beneath her shoulders; he was bending over her to take a kiss, all fresh with lake-water.

"You'll topple over," she warned him.

"Pooh," he said. "One, Gwenna!"

He always said her name as if it were "darling"—he did not call her "dear" or "darling" much. She found that she adored him for this, as for everything that he said or did. Once, in one of those old-time talks of theirs, Leslie had said, "For every three times

a man asks for a kiss refuse him twice. An excellent plan, Taffy——" The happy girl-wife thought there need be no use of "plans" with him and her. She teased him—if she wanted to.

Eyes laughed into eyes now. She threw back her head, evading him, but only for a second. His mouth met hers, dewy as a lotus-bud. The boy and girl kissed closely. Nothing could come between that kiss, she thought.

Then, sudden as a flash of summer lightning, *something came.*

A thought; a shadow; a fear at last.

All these halcyon hours she had known no fear. All those weeks that her husband had been in France she had been certain, at the bottom of her heart, of his safety. She had known by that queer sense of presentiment she possessed that he would come back to her. He'd come back to make this perfect time for which all her unawakened girlhood had been waiting. And now, by that same queer sixth sense, she suddenly found herself realizing that he would not—No, no! *That he might not come back to her the second time.* . . . Suddenly, suddenly the shadow crept over her, taking the glow and colour out of their idyll even at this golden moment. With his lips warm on hers she shivered as if the water in which she swayed had suddenly grown many degrees colder. Supposing he should not return? In two days' time now he was leaving her. Supposing that she were never to see him again? She shut her eyes, felt herself for a horrible second surrounded by darkness, and alone. . . . She heard his sharp question, "What's the matter?" and opened her eyes again.

His head was dark against the blue little ripples of light passed over his blonde face; ripples cast up

from the water. The boat tilted, and his arm held her more tightly. He said again, " What is it ? "

Then, in her own ears, her voice said serenely, " It's all right."

The cloud had passed, as suddenly as it had fallen. She knew, somehow, that it would be " all right." Whatever happened, this worst catastrophe of all was not going to fall upon her. She was not going to be left alone and in darkness, her sun of Love gone down. Such a light could not have been kindled, just to be put out again. She would not be forced to live without him. *That* could not be. Why, the thing was unthinkable. Yet, somehow that was going to be made " all right."

" You swim back again and get your things on, as quick as you can," he ordered her. " That was a touch of cramp you got, I expect."

" I'm all right now," she again said.

She sighed when at last they left that lovely Paradise of theirs behind them.

They went down hill at a good swinging pace, his arm again girdling the dove-grey frock. He said, " We'll get tea and topping light-cakes at one of those cottages before we come to the village, shall we ? Are you starving, Little Thing ? I know I am. Soon be there now."

" I know," she said, " I wasn't sighing because I wanted my tea. Only because . . . It seems such a pity that we *ever* have to come down from here ! " she told him, nestling in his arm.

But she did not tell him of her sudden fear, nor of its sudden passing, though (in her heart that beat below his hand) the thought of both remained.

CHAPTER III

A LAST FAVOUR

THAT thought at the heart of Gwenna seemed to grow with every hour that passed.

And they were passing now so rapidly, the hours that remained to her with her husband! One more blissful day spent on the mountains (but always with that growing thought behind it: "*He has to go soon. Perhaps he will not come back this time. The new machine may let him down somehow, perhaps*").

One more train-journey, whizzing through country of twenty different aspects, just him and her together (but still in her mind that thriving dread: "*Very likely he may not come back. He has had so many narrow escapes! That time he told me about when he came down from behind the clouds and the machine was hit on both sides at once: our men firing on him as well, thinking his was an enemy craft! He got up into the clouds again and escaped that time. Next time as likely as not . . .*").

One more night they were together in the London hotel where Uncle Hugh had always put up. Paul slept, with a smile on his face that looked so utterly boyish while he was asleep: his blonde head nestled into her neck. Gwenna, waking uneasily once or twice, and with his arms still about her, was haunted by her fear as by a nightmare. "*It's more than likely*

that he may not come back this time. This time I feel that he is not going to come back!" And the feeling grew with the growing light outside the window, until she told herself: *"I know it! I know that I am right——"*

Then came the wonder in her mind, *"Why am I not wretched about this? Why do I feel that it's not going to matter after all, and that it's going to be 'all right'?"*

Still wondering, she fell asleep again.

But in the morning her presentiment was a thing full-grown.

Paul, off to the Front, would never come back again.

Quite early they were at the Aircraft Works where he was to leave his young wife and to fetch his machine, the completed P.D.Q. that was to take him out to France.

He had spoken of her—that machine—in the train coming along. And Gwenna, the dazed and fanciful, had thought sharply: *"Ah! That's her revenge. That's what's going to be the end of this fight between the Girl and the Machine. I won. I got him from her. This is how she takes him back, the fiancée! He will be killed in that machine of his."*

Her headstrong, girlish fancy persisted. It was as real to her as any of the crowd of everyday and concrete realities that they found, presently, at the bustling Aircraft Works.

When Paul (who was to start at midday, flying across to France) changed into his uniform and flying-kit, it seemed to her to set the seal upon her premonition.

He would never wear other kit again now, upon this earth.

The Aeroplane Lady, bracingly cheerful, met them with a sheaf of official documents for the young Army aviator.

"I'm going to steal him from you for a quarter of an

hour, Mrs. Dampier," she said with a little nod; and she took the young man into her office.

Gwenna, left alone outside, walked up and down the sunny yard mechanically.

She could not have said what her thoughts were. Probably she had no thoughts. Nothing but the steady throb, quiet and reiterated as the pulse of the machinery in the shops, of that conviction of fatality that she felt.

It seemed to run on in her head as the belting ran on the shaft: "He won't come back. He won't come back!"

It was in the middle of this monotonous inward muttering that the door of the office opened, and there came out a shortish figure, leather-jacketed and with enveloping overalls and wearing a cap with goggles, peak behind. It was young Mr. Ryan.

He raised his cap and would have passed Gwenna quickly, but she stopped him.

She didn't know why. Since her marriage she had (ungratefully enough) almost forgotten the red-haired young man's existence, and perhaps it was not so much himself as his cap and mufflings that caught her eye now.

"Why, are you going up?" she asked.

"Yes," said young Ryan gloomily.

He seemed to be in the worst of tempers as he went on, grumblingly. He was going up. Just his luck. Plenty of times he'd wanted to go and hadn't been allowed. Now he'd got to go, just when he didn't want to.

"You don't want to?" Gwenna repeated.

Mr. Ryan coloured a little. "Well, if I've got to, that doesn't matter."

"Why don't you want to?" Gwenna asked, half indifferent, half surprised. To her it had always

appeared the one thing to want to do. She had been put off time after time. Now here was he, grumbling that it was just his luck to go.

Then she thought she could guess why he didn't want to go up just now. She smiled faintly. Was it that Mr. Ryan had—somebody—to see?

Mr. Ryan blushed richly. Probably he did so not on this somebody's account, but because it was Gwenna who asked the question. One does not care for the sympathetic questions of the late idol, even when another fills the shrine. He told Gwenna: "I've got to go with your husband as a passenger. He's had a wire to bring another man over to one of the repairing bases; and so he's spotted me."

"To bring over? D'you mean to France?"

"Yes. Not that they want *me*, of course; but just somebody. So I've got to go, I suppose."

Gwenna was silent, absorbed. She glanced away across the flat eighty-acre field beyond the yards, where the planes of Paul's new biplane gleamed like a parallel ruler in the sun. A ruler marked with inches, each inch being one of the seams that Gwenna had carefully doped over. About the machine two or three dark figures moved, giving finishing touches, seeing that all was right.

And young Ryan was to fly in her, with Paul!

It wasn't Ryan they wanted, but "just somebody." . . . And then, all in a moment, Gwenna, thinking, had a very curious little mental experience. As once before she had had that "flying dream," and had floated up from earth and had seen her own body lying inert and soulless on her bed, so now the same thing happened. She seemed to see herself in the yard. Herself, quite still and nonchalant, talking to this young man in cap and goggles who had to go to France just

when he particularly wanted to go somewhere else. She saw all the details, quite clearly: his leather jacket, herself, in her blouse and skirt, the cylindrical iron, steam chambers where they steamed the skids, the Wing-room door, and beyond it the new biplane waiting in the field two hundred yards away.

Then she saw herself put her hand on the young man's leathern sleeve. She heard her own voice ascending, as it were, to her. It was saying what seemed to be the most matter-of-fact thing in the world.

"Then don't go. You go later, Mr. Ryan. Follow him on. You go and meet your girl instead; it will be all right."

He was staring blankly at her. She wondered what he saw to stare at.

"What? What d'you mean, Mrs. Dampier? I'm bound to go. Military orders."

"Yes; they are for him, not for you. *You* aren't under military orders." This was in her own, quite calm and detached little voice with its un-English accent. "You say anybody'd do. He can take—somebody else."

"Isn't anybody else," she heard young Ryan say. Then she heard from her own lips the most surprising thing of all.

"Yes, there's somebody. You give me those things of yours. I'm going instead of you."

Then Mr. Ryan laughed loudly. He seemed to see a joke that Gwenna did not see. "Well, for a film-drama, that takes it!" he laughed.

She did not laugh. She heard herself say, softly, earnestly, swiftly: "Listen to me. Paul is going away and I have never been up with him yet. I was always promised a flight. And always something got in the way of it. And now he's going. He will never——"

Her voice corrected itself.

"He *may* never come back. I may never get another chance of flying with him. Let me—let me have it! Say you will!"

But Mr. Ryan, instead of saying he would, became suddenly firm and peremptory. Perhaps it was the change in his voice that brought Gwenna Dampier, with a start, back to herself. She was no longer watching herself. She was watching young Ryan's face, intently, desperately. But she was still quite calm. It seemed to her that since an idea and a plan had come to her out of nowhere, it would be mad to throw them away again untried.

"Let me go; it will be all right! Let me get into your things."

"Quite out of the question," said young Ryan, with growing firmness—the iron mask of the man who knows himself liable to turn wax in the hands of a woman. "Not to be thought of."

She set her teeth. It was life and death to her now, what he refused. She could have flown at him like a fury for his obstinacy. She knew, however, that this is no road to a woman's attainment of her desires. With honeyed sweetness, and always calmly, she murmured: "You were always so nice to me, Mr. Ryan. I liked you so!"

"I say, don't——"

"I am sure that girl must be devoted to you. Isn't she? The one you want to see? Oh, yes! Well, think if it were *she* who begged to be with *you*," pleaded Gwenna softly and deadly calm. Her knuckles were white on the hands that she held clasped against her breast. "Think if she begged for one last, last little time!"

"Look here; it's imposs——"

"I never begged for anyone anything before, in my whole life. Never! Not even my husband. Only you! It's the first—the last favour, Mr. Ryan! You used to say you'd do anything——"

"No, please; I say——!"

"He's always said he would take me. You can follow us on. Yes, indeed it will be all right——"

Here Paul, passing with the Aeroplane Lady at the end of the yard, on his way to the machine in the field, saw by the steam reservoir his young wife talking earnestly to the red-haired Ryan chap, who was to be his passenger. He heard her say: "You must, Peter, you *must!*"

He hadn't known that the Little Thing called that fellow by his Christian name, but he thought he knew the kind of thing that she would be saying to Ryan; begging him to keep an eye upon her husband, to do anything he could for him (Paul) since they were both going over to France together.

"It will be all right," repeated Gwenna to young Ryan in a settled kind of tone. "You'll give me your things, and then you'll stay here, out of the way until we've gone. You will!"

Thereupon Mr. Ryan became firmer than ever.

"Can't be done, Mrs. Dampier," he said curtly. "Afraid that ends it!"

* * * * * *

In the meantime Paul was making a last tour of the P.D.Q.

"Just start her, will you?" he said to one of his mechanics.

A harsh roar rattled out over the countryside. Paul touched parts here and there.

"All right," he said; and the engine was shut off again. Then he turned to Mrs. Crewe.

"Well," he said, "if you don't mind——" He glanced first at his wrist-watch and then in the direction of the buildings. The Aeroplane Lady smiled.

"I think you'll find her in the office," she replied.

He crossed the field and walked straight into the office, but Gwenna was not there. He passed into the Wing-room where he had seen her at work. She was not there, either; only two of the lads in blue overalls were bringing in a wing. He said to them: "Is Mrs. Dampier in the central shop? Just tell her I'm here, will you? I shall have to be off very soon." In a moment one of the lads returned to say that Mrs. Dampier was not in the shops.

"Go out that way and find her, will you, then?" he said. "I'll go out the other way; ask her to wait for me in the Wing-room if you find her first." He went out to search for his wife. He sought her in the shops and in the sheds. She was not to be found. He came back to the Wing-room; it was empty, except for the Great Dane, lying in his corner blinking wisely, with his head on his paws. Dismayed (for he would have not more than a moment to spare with her now) young Dampier came out and sent a lad on a bicycle up to Mrs. Crewe's cottage to find out if his wife were there. Perhaps the Little Thing had forgotten the cap-comforter she was going to give him, and had gone to fetch that. Mrs. Crewe herself walked back from the field, and found him almost running about the yards again.

"What, haven't you found her? Isn't she anywhere about?" cried the Aeroplane Lady in astonishment. "This is most extraordinary. She must be here somewhere——"

"I've been and I've sent all over the place," said the

young aviator, distressed. "Here, I've got to start in a minute, and she isn't here to see me before I go. I can't imagine what's become of her!"

The Aeroplane Lady could imagine. She had had the quick thought that Gwenna Dampier, at the last moment, had gone away, hidden herself from that ordeal of last farewells. Perhaps the little creature couldn't stand it," she thought. It was, when all was said, a heart-breaking moment. . . .

The Aeroplane Lady said softly: "Perhaps your wife's one of the people who don't want to say any good-bye, Mr. Dampier. Like some people thinking it's unlucky to watch people out of sight!"

"Well, I've hunted all over the place," he said, turning away, agitated and dismayed. "Tell her, will you, Mrs. Crewe, I shan't be able to wait any longer. I was to start at midday. I shall be late. You explain to her, please. Where's Ryan—ah, there he is."

For across the field he saw a short, muffled-up, brown figure, climbing, rather hurriedly, into the passenger's seat. It sat, waiting without looking round.

The last stroke of twelve sounded from the clock of the factory. The whistle blew. The men trooped out of the works; everyone of them cast a glance towards the field where the biplane was ready. Several of them in a group turned off there to watch the start.

Paul joined them and walked across the field.

His brows were knitted; it was dashed hard lines that he couldn't see *her* for good-bye. His wife! She ought to have seen him off. . . . Poor Little sweet Thing, she thought she couldn't stick it—— He wondered where on earth she'd gone and hidden herself?

CHAPTER IV

THE DEPARTURE FOR FRANCE

GWENNA sat, for the first time in her life, in an aeroplane.

She had very little actual notion of how she came to be there. It was all confused in her mind, that which had happened between Mr. Ryan's so resolute "Can't be done, Mrs. Dampier," and its having been "done." What had prevailed? Her own begging? Mr. Ryan's wish to see his girl? Or her, Gwenna's, calm assurances, repeated from that day in Wales, that it would be "all right"? She wasn't sure which of all these things had brought her here safely where she was, in the passenger-seat of Paul's biplane. She hardly remembered putting on the rough and voluminous brown clothes while Mr. Ryan mounted guard over the little stokehole of the steam chambers.

She only knew that she had walked, easily and undiscovered, across the field before the whistle blew. That she'd climbed unassisted into that small wicker seat, and that she was now waiting there, muffled up to the tip of her nose, the edge of the cap almost meeting the muffler, goggles down, and gloves hiding her little hands. She was no more to be distinguished from a man than if she had been a diver encased for a descent into the sea.

She did not even trouble to wonder at her own wonderful luck in the affair.

A thousand little accidents might have betrayed her—and she had escaped them all. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to her. Once or twice one of the men had spoken to her, but a wave of the hand had been answer enough for him. It had been all right. And of course everything was going to be all right.

She was not going to be put off by pretexts any longer.

And she was not going to be left behind, without him. In another minute—two minutes—they would be off, he and she!

Furtively she glanced round.

Paul was holding both the Aeroplane Lady's small, capable hands in those big boy's paws of his.

"Good-bye," he was saying. "So long, I mean. I say, you'll——"

"I'll look after *her*," promised the Aeroplane Lady, very brightly.

"Thanks awfully. You would," said Paul. "Bless you."

"My dear boy——" began the Aeroplane Lady as if she were going to say something grave, but she ended lightly, "Well, you've a glorious day for it. The best of luck!—And to you, Mr. Ryan!"

Again the passenger waved a gloved hand in reply.

Then Gwenna felt the tip and creak of the machine, as Paul climbed into his place behind her.

André dashed up to grasp his hand, calling "*Bonne chance!*"

"Thanks!" said Paul. "Right away."

Then, as the propeller pulsed like an angry nerve, Gwenna gave a start.

An appalling roar and wind seemed all about her. Faintly, very faintly, the noise of the good-bye cheer rose through it. The hat-waving group of men with wide-open mouths seemed to slide back. The Aeroplane bumped over the rough field. And then it ceased to bump. Gwenna drew in her breath, sharply. To right of her, to left of her, the horizon seemed to sway ever so gently. She thought, but was not sure, that she heard Paul's voice behind her, bawling, "Trim."

As she settled herself in her seat, the horizon fell away altogether. . . . All was sunlit blue! The swiftest run in the motor down the smoothest bit of hill had been nothing to this that was coming; faster, faster. . . .

"There's only one pity," she thought hastily. "He's thinking now that I let him go without saying good-bye!"

Here she had a glimpse of the khaki-green earth far below, as blurred with height and speed as was the raving invisible propeller itself.

For at last—at last—it was flight!

CHAPTER V

THE NUPTIAL FLIGHT

YES; at last it was flight.

She now, too, was perched up on this structure that had tucked those little bicycle wheels and skids underneath it, as a bird tucks its no longer required feet; she, too, was being borne up aloft on those vast cambered pinions that let the sunlight half through, like the roof of a transparent marquee. In this new machine of Paul's, the passenger-seat was set on a slightly projecting platform, with aluminium-like uprights of a peculiar section. At first, all that Gwenna knew of this easy balancing and dipping and banking of the machine, was that there was a bright triangle of sunlight about her feet, and that this triangle grew sometimes small, sometimes large, and sometimes spread so that half of her was sitting in the warm September sunlight; presently to swerve into the shadow again.

Mechanically tightening her grip on one or other of the aluminium stays, instinctively yielding her body to this unexpected angle or that, she watched that triangle of sunlight. She was not giddy or breathless; she felt no fear at all, only a growing triumph and delight as the soaring biplane sped on—on——

Once she gave a little " Oh, look ! " lost in the hum of the engine. It was when a tiny flicker of shadow fell upon her patch of sunlight and was gone ; the shadow of some bird flying higher than they, a crow, perhaps. It was just after this that she noticed, near that advancing and retiring wedge of sunlight at her feet, something else. This was a little oval hole in the floor of the platform. A hole for observation. It brought home to her how frail a floor supported her weight and his ; still she felt no terror ; only wonder. She smiled under her mufflings, thinking that hole was like a knot-hole in a wooden bridge over the river at home. As a small child she had always been fascinated by that hole, and had gazed down through it at the rushing bottle-green water and the bubbles and the boulders below. She glanced down this one, but her unaccustomed eyes could hardly see anything. She leaned forward and looked down below the machine, but still could distinguish little. Woods, roads, meadows, or whatever they were crossing, were still only a warm and moving blur. Once they passed, quickly, a big patch of pink and purple, she thought it might be a town, but wasn't sure.

She sat up again in her seat, giving herself up to her own feelings in this new and breathless experience ; her feelings, that were as undistinguishable as the landscape over which the biplane swept—a warm blur of delights.

She gripped the stays ; she laughed happily to herself behind the mufflings, she even sang aloud, knowing that it was drowned in the noise of the engine. She hummed the sheerest medley of scraps of things, tags of Musical Comedy picked up at Westminster—some verses out of Leslie's love-songs. Once it was the then universal " Tipperary." And presently

it resolved itself into a Welsh folk-song that the singing-class at her school had practised over and over again—"The Rising of the Lark," a blithely defiant tune that seemed best to match her mood as the biplane sped.

Yes! All the bird-like, soaring spirit in her had come to its own. Everything else was cast behind her. . . . She'd always felt, dimly and uncomfortably, that a great part of herself, Gwenna, was just an uninteresting, commonplace little girl. . . . That part had gone! It had been left behind her, just as her bodily form had been left sleeping on her bed, that midsummer night, while her soul flew through dreams.

"Dreams!" she thought incoherently. "It's *not* true what people say about the dream-come-true, and how one's always disappointed in it. I'm not—ah, I'm not! This flying! This is more glorious than I expected—even with *him*——!"

Then came a thought that checked her singing rapture.

"If only *he* knew! But he doesn't."

Behind her, Paul, driving, had made no sign to the passenger. She could guess at the busyness of him. His dear, strong hands, she knew, were on the wheel. They were giving a touch to the throttle here and there. His feet, too, must be vigilantly busy; now this one doing something essential, now that. She supposed his whole body must be dipping from time to time, just as that triangle of sunlight dipped and crept. It was all automatic to him, she expected. He could work that machine while he was thinking, just as she herself could knit and think.

"He's thinking of me," she told herself with a rueful little pang. "He's wondering about my not saying

good-bye. He must have minded that. That'll be all right, though. I'll let him know, presently; I'll pull down my muffler and look round. Presently. Not yet. Not until it's too late for him to turn back or set me down——"

And again she hummed to herself in her little tune; inaudible, exultant. The shining triangle of sunlight disappeared from the platform. All became level light about her. It seemed growing colder. And beyond her, far ahead, she spied a sweep of monotonous grey.

She guessed what that meant.

"The sea!" she told herself, thrilled. "We'll be flying over the sea soon. *Then* he can't do anything about sending me back. Then I shall put up these goggles and push this cap off my curls. Then he'll see. He'll know that it's me that's flying with him!" And she held away from herself that thought that even so this flight could not last for ever, there would be the descent in France, the good-bye that she had evaded —No! It must last!

Again she forgot all else in the rushing joy of it.

Suddenly she felt something jolt hard against her left arm, for the first time Paul was trying to attract his passenger's attention. Twice her arm was jolted by something. Then she put out her brown gloved hand to it, grasping what had jolted her. She drew it forward as he loosed it to her clutch.

It was a gun; a carbine.

What—Why——?

She remembered something that she had heard Paul say, dim ages ago, when she had watched him in the office, consulting with the Aeroplane Lady over that machine-gun with that wicked-looking little nozzle that he had decided not to mount upon the P.D.Q.

" It'll have to be a rifle after all."

Little Gwenna in her brown disguise sat with this rifle across her knees, wondering.

Why did Paul wish Mr. Ryan to be armed with this ? Why hadn't he handed over that carbine just when they were about to start ? Why only now, just when they had got as far as the sea ?

For she was certain now that what was below them was the sea. There was a bright, silvery glitter to the right, but the floating floor of the biplane shut that out again. To the left all was of a slaty grey. The sun's level rays shot along the length of the biplane as if it were down a gallery.

Gwenna sat there, holding that carbine across her brown wrapped knees, and still puzzling over it. Why had Paul handed the thing over, so suddenly ? She could not see the reason.

Even when it appeared she did not at first see the reason.

Paul Dampier had been quicker to see it than she.

Of a sudden there broke out—there is no other word for it—a silence more startling than all that harsh raving of the propeller that had been stopped. At the same instant Gwenna felt the floor fall away suddenly on her left and mount as dizzily on her right. The biplane was tilted up in the air just as a ladder is tilted against the side of the house. And the engine was giving short staccato roars into the silences as Paul kept her going. He had shut off, and was making a giddy swoop down, down to the left. She heard his voice. Sharply he cried out :

" There ! Out to the left ! The Taube ! There he is ! "

The next moment the engine was roaring again. The

biplane had lifted to the opposite curve of a swooping figure eight.

And now the girl in the passenger-seat saw in the air beside them, scarcely two hundred yards away, what the pilot had seen.

It was another aeroplane ; a monoplane.

CHAPTER VI

THE WINGED VICTORY

NOW Gwenna, although she'd been clerk and assistant to the Aeroplane Lady herself, and although she loved the idea of aeroplanes as other girls have loved the idea of jewels, scarcely knew one pattern of monoplane from another.

They were all the same to her as far as overlapping the seams with the doped strips was concerned. Nevertheless, in this machine that seemed suddenly to have appeared out of nowhere, there struck her something that was quite unfamiliar. Never before had she seen that little blade-shaped drag from the tips of the wings. It gave to this machine the look of a flying pigeon. . . . She had only noticed it for a moment, as the monoplane had lurched, as it were, into view over the edge of their own lower plane. Then it lurched out of sight again.

Again their engine was shut off; and again she heard Paul's voice, excited, curt.

"Can you get him, do you think?"

Get him? Bewilderingly she wondered what Paul could mean.

Then came another staccato rush of sound. Then another silence, and Paul's voice through it.

"All right. I'll get above him; and you can shoot through the floor."

The engine brayed again, this time continuously.

" Shoot ! " gasped Gwenna.

Shoot at that machine through the hole in the floor of this one ? It was a German craft, then ? And Paul meant Mr. Ryan to shoot whoever was in that machine. And she, Gwenna, who had never had a gun in her hands before in her life, found herself in the midst of War, told to shoot——

Hardly knowing one end of the thing from the other, she grasped the carbine. She guessed that the flyer in the other machine must have realized what Paul meant to do.

They were rising ; he was rising too.

And suddenly she became aware that there was sunlight about them no longer. All was a dun and chilly white. Paul, trying to get above the other, and the other trying to prevent him, had both run up together into a cloud. Once before the Welsh girl had had this experience. On a rocky mountain-path up Cader Idris she had walked into a thick mist that wrapped her from seeing anything in front of her, even though she could hear the voices of tourists just a little ahead.

And now here they saw nothing, but they could hear.

Even through the noise of their propeller Gwenna's ears caught a smaller noise. It seemed to come from just below.

She had got the muzzle of the carbine through the hole at her feet. Desperately, blindly she fumbled at what she thought must be the trigger. Behind her goggles, she shut her eyes tightly. The thing went off before she knew how it had done so.

Then, nothing. . . .

Then the propeller had stopped again. She felt her shoulder touched from behind. Paul's voice called, " Got him, Ryan ? "

" I—I don't know," she gasped, turning. " I—*Paul! It's me!*"

It was a wonder that the biplane did not completely overturn.

Paul Dampier had wrenched himself forward out of the straps and had taken one hand from the wheel. His other clutched Gwenna's shoulder, and the clutch dragged away the muffler at her white throat and her goggles slipped aside. Aghast he glared at her. The Little Thing herself? Here?

" Good——here, keep still. Great——! For Heaven's sake, don't move. I'll run for it. He can't catch me. I was trying to catch him. He can't touch us—— We'll race—hold tight, Gwen—ready." He opened the throttle again; while Gwenna, white-faced, took in the tornado of wind with parted lips and turned sideways to stare with wide-open eyes.

Then a number of things seemed to happen very quickly.

The first of these was a sharp " Ping!" on one of the aluminium stays. Gwenna found herself gazing blankly at the round hole in the wing a yard to the right of her. The next thing was that the fog—mist —or cloud, had disappeared. All was clear sky about them once more. The third thing was that, hardly a stone's toss away, and only missed by a miracle in the cloud, they saw the monoplane and the aviator in her.

He was bareheaded, for that blind, wild shot of the British girl's had stripped away his head-covering, and there was a trickle of scarlet down his cheek. His hair was a gilded stubble, his eyes hard and blue and Teutonic. His flying-gear was buttoned plastron-wise above his chest, just as that white linen jacket of his had been; and Karl Becker, waiter, spy and aviator, gave a little

nod, as much as to say that he recognized that they were meeting not for the first time. . . .

One glimpse showed all this. The next instant both German and Englishman had turned to avoid the imminent collision. But the German did more than turn.

He had been fired on and hit; now was his shot. Dampier, with no thought now but to get his wife out of danger, crowded the biplane on. As the machines missed one another by hardly ten feet, she heard the four cracks of Paul's revolver.

Little Gwenna thought she had never heard anything so fascinating, horrible, and sweet. He was fighting not for his own life only. And he was not now being fired at, far from her, hoping that she need never know. For she also, she was in danger with him; she who did not want to die before him but who would not wish to live for one moment after him.

Moments? When every moment was a whole life, what could be more perilously, unimaginedly sweet than this?

"I knew I had to come," she gasped to herself. "Never away from him again! Never——"

Her heart was racing like the propeller itself with just such speed, such power. More love than it could bear was crowded into every throb of it. For one more of those moments that were more than years she must look at him and see him look at her. . . .

One look!

As they tore through the air she turned in her straps, pushing the curls back from her brow. Her eyes met his, set and intent over the wheel.

She smiled at him.

Up out of the depths of his intentness she saw the answering smile come into his own eyes. He nodded. He meant that it was all right. His lips moved.

"He can't—touch—us!" he was shouting. His girl threw back her head as far as it would go, offering her face for the kiss that she knew he could not give. He nodded again, laughed outright, and stretched his own head forward. It was all a kiss, despite the constraining straps—or almost all.

More of a kiss than many lovers know, more of a marriage!

For then it was that the German's shot rang out, completing their caress. Never was dearer nor more precious union, never less pain, so lost was it in rapture. As gently as if he had only just said Good-night the boy's head sank on the wheel; as for hers, it never moved. She still lay, leaning back with lips parted, as if to-morrow would see her kissed awake again. . . . His hands twitched once only. That movement cut off the throttle. Again, for the last time, the propeller stopped.

The Taube was already a vanishing speck in the distance. . . .

The P.D.Q. yawed, hung poised, began to slide tail first, and gathered speed.

Up, up came the silver waves of the English Channel.

POSTSCRIPT

MYRTLE AND LAUREL LEAF

IT was the week before Christmas, Nineteen-fourteen. London wore her dreariest winter livery of mud-brown and fog-yellow, and at three o'clock on such an afternoon there would have been brilliant lights everywhere . . . any other, ordinary year.

This year, Londoners had to find their way as best they could through the gloom.

Across a wide Square with a railed and shrubberied garden in the centre of it, there picked her way a very tall girl in furs that clung about her as bushy ivy hangs about some slender tree. She wore a dark velvet coat broadly belted over her strait hips, and upon her impish head there was perched one of the little, black velvet, half-military caps that were still the mode. This girl peered up at the numbers of the great houses at the side of the Square; finally, seeing the gilt-lettered inscription that she sought above one of the doors,

"ANNEXE TO THE CONVALESCENT HOME FOR WOUNDED OFFICERS,"

she rang the bell.

The door was opened to her by a small trim damsel in the garb of the Girl-Guides, who ushered her into a

large and ornate hall, and into the presence of a fresh-coloured, fair-haired Personage—she was evidently no less—in nurse's uniform.

This Personage gazed upon the visitor with a suspicious and disapproving look.

"I wonder why? It isn't because I'm not blamelessly tidy for once in my life, and she can't guess that the furs and the brown velvet suit are cast-offs from the opulent," thought the visitor swiftly. Aloud she added in her clear, nonchalant tone: "I have come to see Mr. Scott, please."

"Three is the visiting-hour. It is not quite three yet," said the nurse forbiddingly.

"I'll wait, then," said the visitor. For two minutes she waited. Then the nurse approached her with a note-book and a pencil.

"Will you write your name down here?" she said austerely. And upon a page inscribed "*Mr. M. Scott*" the visitor wrote her name, "Miss Leslie Long."

"Will you come up?" the nurse said reluctantly. And Leslie ascended a broad red-carpeted stairway, and was shown into a great room of parquet floors and long windows and painted panels that had been a drawing-room, and that was now turned by a row of small beds on great castors and by several screens into a hospital-ward.

A blonde youth in a pink pyjama jacket, and with his arm in a black silken sling, was sitting up in bed and chatting to a white-moustached gentleman beside him; another of the wounded was sitting by one of the great fire-places, reading; a couple were playing picquet in a corner, under a smiling Academy portrait of the mistress of the mansion.

"Mr. Scott is sitting up to-day, in the ante-room," vouchsafed the nurse. And Leslie Long entered,

through a connecting door, a small room to the right.

One wall of it was hung with a drapery of ancient brown tapestry, showing giant figures amidst giant foliage; beneath it was a low couch. Upon this, covered with a black, panther-skin rug, there lay, half sitting up, supported on his elbow, the young wounded officer whom Leslie had come to see.

"Frightfully good of you, this," he said cheerfully, as she appeared.

She looked down at him.

For the moment she could not speak. She set down on his couch the sheaf of golden chrysanthemums that she had brought, and the copy of the *Natal Newsletter* that she had thought might cheer him. She found herself about to say a very foolish thing: "So they left you your handsome eyes, Monty."

The face in which those eyes shone now was thin and drawn; and it seemed as if all the blood had been drained from it. His crutches stood in the corner at the foot of the couch. He was Monty Scott, the Dean's son, once a medical student and would-be sculptor. Yes; he had been a dilettante artist once, but he looked a thorough soldier now. The small moustache and the close-cropped hair suited him well. He had enlisted in the Halberdiers at the beginning of the War. He had got his commission and had lost his leg at Ypres.

Not again would he wear that Black Panther get-up to any fancy-dress dance. . . . Never again.

This was the thought, trivial and irrelevant enough, that flashed through Leslie's mind, bringing with it a rush of tears that she had to bite her lips to check. She had to clench her nails into her palms, to open her black eyes widely and smilingly, and to speak in the clearest and most flippant tone that she could summon.

"Hullo, Monty! Nice to see you again; now that I *can* see you. You wounded warriors *are* guarded by a dragon!—thanks, I'll sit down here." She turned the low chair by the couch with its back to the light. "Yes, I could hardly get your Ministering-Angel-Thou to let me through. Glared at me as if she thought I was after the spoons. (I suppose that's exactly what some of them *are* after?" suggested Miss Long, laughing quite naturally.) "She evidently took me for just another predatory feline come to send the patient's temperature soaring upwards. It's not often I'm crushed, but——"

"Oh, Nurse Elsa is all right," said the patient, laughing too. "You know, I think she feels bound to be careful about new people. She seems to have a mania for imagining that everybody fresh may be a German spy!"

"A *German?* Why should she think that?"

"Oh, possibly because—well——" Young Scott lowered his voice and glanced towards that connecting door. But it had been shut. "Because she happens to be 'naturalized' herself, you know!"

They talked; Leslie ever more lightly as she was more deeply touched by the sight of the young man on his couch. So helpless, he who had been so full of movement and fitness and supple youth! So pluckily, resolutely gay, he who had been so early put out of the fun!

Lightly he told Leslie the bare details of his wound. It had been in a field of beet that he had been pipped; when he had been seeing to some barbed wire with a sergeant and a couple of his men, at nightfall. One of those snipers had got him.

"And I was downed in a second," he said ruefully. "*I* couldn't get the beggar!"

Leslie thought of the young, mortally-wounded Mercutio and his impatient cry of "*What! Is he gone,*

and hath nothing?" It was the only complaint at his lot that was ever to pass the lips of this other fighter.

She looked at him, and her heart swelled with pride for him. It sank with shame for herself. She had always held him—well, not as lightly as she said she had. There had been always the sneaking tenderness for the tall, infatuated boy whom she'd laughed at. But why "sneaking"? Why had she laughed? She had thought him so much less than herself. She said she knew so much more. What vanity and crass, superficial folly! A new thrill took her suddenly. Could it be that War, that had cut everybody's life in two, had worked another wonder?

Presently he remarked, "I say, your friends, the poor Dampiers! I suppose nothing's ever been heard of them, after that day that they found out at the Works that his wife had started with him, when he set off for France, and disappeared?"

"Nothing," said Leslie quietly. "Whether it was an accident with his new engine, or whether they were killed by a shot from a German aeroplane they met, we shan't ever know now. It must have been over the sea. . . . Nothing has ever been found. Much the best way, I think. I said so to poor young Mr. Ryan, the man who let her take his place. He was beside himself when he turned up at the Aircraft place again and found that nothing had been heard. He said he'd killed her. I told him she would think he'd done more for her than anybody she knew. The best time to go out! No growing old and growing dull and perhaps growing ill and being kept half alive by bothering doctors, for years. . . . No growing out of love with each other, ever! They, at least, have had something that nothing can spoil."

Monty Scott, turning his small, close-cropped head

of a soldier and his white face towards the tapestry, blurted out: "Well! At all events they've *had* it. But even having it 'spoilt' is better than never having had any——"

He checked himself abruptly.

He was not going to whine now over his own ill-luck in love to her, to Leslie, who had turned him down three times. Not much.

In the suddenly tense atmosphere of the little room overlooking the wide, dim Square, the girl felt the young man's resolution—a resolution that he would keep. He would never ask her for another favour.

He cleared his throat and spoke in an altered tone, casual, matter-of-fact.

"Awfully pretty, the little girl that Dampier married, wasn't she? Usen't she to live at that Club of yours? I think I saw her once, somewhere or other——"

"Yes. You did," said Leslie quickly, and a little breathlessly as though she, too, had just taken a resolution. "At that dance. That river dance. She was the Cherub-girl. And I wore my mauve Nijinski things. You remember that time, Monty?"

"Oh, yes," said the wounded man shortly, "I remember."

There was a slight, uneasy movement under the panther-skin rug.

He hadn't thought that Leslie would have reminded him of those times. Not of that dance, when, with his hands on her hips and her hands clasped at the back of his neck, he had swung round with her in the maddest of waltzes. . . .. He wouldn't have expected her to *remind* him!

Nor was he expecting the next thing that Leslie did. She slipped from that low chair on to her knees by the couch. Her furs touched his hand, delicate and whiter

now than a woman's, and he took it quickly away. He could not look at the vivid, impish face with the black, mocking eyes and the red, mocking mouth that had always bewitched him. Had he looked, he would have seen that the mockery was gone from both. It was gone, too, from Leslie's voice when she next spoke, close to him.

"Monty! At that dance—— Have you forgotten? We were walking by the river—and you said—you asked——"

"Yes, yes; all right. Please don't mind," muttered the man who had been the Black Panther hastily. It was pretty awful, having girls *sorry* for one.

She went on kneeling by him. "I told you that I wasn't in the mood!"

"Yes; but—I say, it doesn't matter one scrap, thanks," declared Monty Scott, very hoarsely.

This was the hardest thing he'd ever yet had to bear; harder than lying out wounded in that wet beetroot-field for nine hours before he could be picked up; harder than the pain, the agonizing, jolting journeys; harder even than the sleepless nights when he had tossed and turned on his bed, next to the bed where a delirious man who had won the D.S.O. cried out in his nightmare unceasingly: "Stick it, boys! Stick it, boys! Stick it, boys!" He (Monty) didn't think he could stick this. There could never be anyone in the world but Leslie for him, that laughing, devil-may-care Leslie at whom "nice" girls looked askance. Leslie who didn't care. Leslie who *pitied* him! Ghastly! Desperately he wished she'd get up and go—*go*——

Suddenly her voice sounded in his ear. Far from being pitying it was so petulant as to convince even him. It cried: "Monty! I said then that you were

an infant-in-arms! If you weren't an infant you could *see!*"

He turned his head quickly on the couch-cushion. But even then he didn't really see. Even then he scarcely took in, for the moment, what he heard.

For the kneeling, radiant girl had to go on, laughing shakily: "I always liked you. . . . After everything I said! After everything I've thought, it comes round to this. *It's better to have loved and settled down than never to have loved at all. . . . Oh!* I've got my head into as bright a rainbow as any of them! . . ." scolded Leslie, laughing again as flutteringly as Paul Dampier's sweetheart might have done. "Oh, I thought that just because one liked a man in the kind of way I liked you, it was no reason to accept him . . . *fool* that I was——"

"Leslie!" he cried very sharply, scarcely believing his ears. "Could you have?—*could* you? And you tell me *now!* When it's too late——"

"Too *late? Won't* you have me? Can't you see that I think you so much more of a man when you're getting about as well as you can on one leg than I did when you were just dancing and fooling about on two? As for me——"

She turned her bright face away.

"It's the same old miracle that never stops happening. I shan't even be a woman, ever," faltered Leslie Long, "unless you help to make me one!"

"You can't mean it? You can't——"

"Can't I? I am 'in the mood' *now*, Monty!" she said, very softly. "Believe me!"

And her long arm was flung, gently and carefully, about her soldier's neck; her lips were close to his.

* * * * * *

When at last she left her lover, Leslie Long walked down the darkened streets near Victoria, quietly and meditatively. And her thoughts were only partly with the man whom she had left so happy. Partly they were claimed by the girl-friend whose marriage morning wish had been, for her, Leslie, to be happy in the same way.

It seemed to Leslie that she was very near her now.

Even as she walked along the tall girl was conscious, in a way not to be described, of a Presence that seemed to follow her and to beset her and to surround her with a sense of loving, laughing, girlish pleasure and fellowship. She saw, *without seeing*, the small, eager, tip-tilted face with bright eyes of river-green and brown, crowned by the wreath of short, thick curls. *Without hearing*, she caught the tone of the soft, un-English, delighted voice that cried, "Oh, *Les*—lie——!"

"Little Taffy! She'd be so full of it, of course. . . . Of *course* she'd be glad! Of *course* she'd know; I can't think she doesn't. Not she, who was so much in love herself," mused Leslie, putting up her hand with her characteristic gesture to tuck in the stray tress of black hair that had come loose under her trim velvet cap. "And the people we've loved can't forget at once, as soon as they've left us. I don't believe that. *She knows.* If *I* could only say something—send some sort of message! Even if it were only like waving a hand! If *I* could make some sign that I shall always care——"

As she thought of it she was passing a row of shops. The subdued light from one of them fell upon swinging garlands of greenery festooned outside; decorations ready for Christmas.

On an impulse Leslie Long turned into this florist's

shop. "I want one of those wreaths you have, please," she said.

"Yes, Madam; a holly-wreath?"

"No. One of those. Laurel."

And while the man fetched down the wreath of broad, dark, pointed leaves, Leslie Long took out one of her cards and a pencil, and scribbled the message that she presently fastened to the wreath. She would not have it wrapped up in paper, but carried it as it was. Then she turned down a side-street to the Embankment, near Vauxhall Bridge. She leaned over the parapet and saw the black, full tide, here and there only jewelled with lights, flowing on, on, past the spanning bridges and the town, away to the sea that had been at last the great, silver, restless resting-place for such young and ardent hearts. . . .

There was a soft splash as she flung the laurel wreath into the flowing water.

Leslie glanced over and watched it carried swiftly past. In a patch of light she saw the tiny white gleam of the card that was tied to the leaves of victory.

This was what she had written upon it:

"For Gwenna and Paul.

Envy, ah, even in tears!
The fortune of their years,
Which, though so few, yet so divinely ended!

THE END

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